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THE JOYS OF FORGETTING

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE LORE OF THE UNICORN
THE HEART OF THOREAU'S JOURNALS
THE HARVEST OF A QUIET EYE

ODELL SHEPARD

THE JOYS OF FORGETTING

A BOOK OF BAGATELLES

With a Foreword by

WALTER DE LA MARE

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1930

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TO

ROBERT HILLYER

FRIEND POET FORGETTER

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FOREWORD

"ALL the world," says Montaigne, "may know me by my book, and my book by me." So saying he set limitless bounds to the most elastic of all literary forms—the essay.

If a sermon contain good doctrine, the preacher need not be apparent in his printed word. The lyrics of *Anon.* flourish only in a rarer air because they appear to have been written by Everyman—with a touch of genius. When the man of science takes up his pen he endeavours to use it self-obliteratingly, though if by the grace of Heaven he be a Charles Darwin or a Francis Galton he need not always succeed in so doing. So, too, with history. So with fiction; the less the novelist obviously intrudes the better.

But in an essay the (inexhaustible) writer of it is its all but all. When, then, Mr. Shepard inquires: "What is an essayist after all but a sort of clergyman or professor who has lost, perhaps only for a time, the courage of his convictions? . . ." we listen not to what he says, but to how he is saying it. Nothing could be less true of him. He never preaches or attempts to proselytize. There is no trace of a we in

his I. He teaches nothing but how to learn, and even as a lecturer he confesses that he sits in spirit among his own audience, and smiles at both. Though, too, it would be an easy task to compile from these pages a fairly long list of his convictions, the process would not resemble that of extracting quills from the fretful porpentine. They are here, but chiefly in diffusion. They are distillable from his state of mind.

Like one of the "candle-holders" who have his inmost sympathy, he has looked on at men and things, intent on seeing them in proportion. He chooses his points of vantage: now battlemented about with his folios, those "stained and lop-eared bescribbled veterans" so disposed in his book-room as to be within easy reach; now from a railway-carriage window, and anon from the topmost deck of a steamer in mid-ocean.

Of the four selves into which he analyses man on page 124, the second, we are soon assured, has had little share in this book; and the fourth probably far more than its owner himself surmises. Its oubliette was not so deep but that its occupant could catch strains less intimidating and final than those of the Last Trump.

Browse where we may in this book, then,

we share the author's company, candid, serene, detached, amused, yet profoundly concerned with what he has loved in life so well and so faithfully that his positives need no superlatives.

And his prose keeps pace with him—a prose "strictly meditated," yet unlaboured, and at ease. How indeed (for those who still value it) can the pleasure be computed of reading what has been written with loving but "incessant care," concealing its art and at the same time revealing the artist? The mere handling of words betrays the poet and the devotee of these seemingly man-made marvels—more elusive than the hummingbird, mightier than Behemoth, more potent than mandragora, and strange as snow.

But whatever the pains—and who can exaggerate them?—of weaving words together, Mr. Shepard seems to have been happy in the act of writing, and that is not only exceedingly rare, but irresistible in the reading. He knows where to begin; better still, he knows when it is time to end; and for the rest he is intent on all that lies between.

He delights in marginalia, as indeed he should, being the owner of his exquisitely enviable copy of the *Chronicles of England.*

He is a bookworm, that is, but one long since out of its chrysalis, and his wings are dyed with the colours hidden in rare tomes in unusual libraries. But to love books as he does needs a lot of life. And though his courage may not be revealed by the convictions he positively expresses, it shows itself in his choice of themes. Not so much when he explores the haunts of the unicorn or the hobby-horse, as when he writes of childhood and of toys—if that can be called courage which manifests no fear of danger. And even if he had shared with us no more of the objective universe than the three cornelian marbles (on page 87), or Dido, or the Oxford pigs and ducks, or the little Egyptian mummy, or Waldo's rocking-horse, or the little old man with the telescope, we should have had our full reward.

One can judge of a book by asking what particular readers, and especially among those who have gone their way, would most enjoy reading it. That being so, Mr. Shepard is happy in his ghosts. Scholars, it is true, are "an unaccountable lot," but here is a pen that has not lost its intuition in gaining grace. Its wisdom is none the less wisdom for not wagging a long grey beard on its chin. Its humour is like the bloom on the

grape called patience, having been ripened, it may be, through a good many storms. The wit is somewhere between sweet and dry, and leaves that smack of irony on the palate which is a wonderful preservative both in life and in literature.

And last: of his courtesy Mr. Shepard has refrained (as yet) from attempting any definition of the writer of introductions—a strange creature, resembling that peculiar kind of vandal who scratches his initials on the alabaster monuments of sage or crusader; in the hope, it may be, of snatching a shred of vicarious immortality. E.g.,

W. d. l. M.

September, 1928

PREFACE

ONE hundred and eighty years of book-making have gone by since Dr. Johnson decided that all the good titles had been used up, and things have now come to such a pass that the naming of a book often seems as much a task as the writing of it. Authors are put to such strange shifts already that we may foresee the time when they will simply number their books as musicians do their compositions and as the great American cities do their streets. Meanwhile, this difficulty of christening, most apparent in a volume of miscellaneous contents, is sometimes evaded by using for a whole collection the title of one of its items. Thus I might have called the present book "Adventures in the Dictionary" or even "Cui Bono?" if those titles did not lie so obviously open to sarcastic comment from the reviewers. The fact is, however, that the contents of the book are not quite miscellaneous. Unless I have erred in selection and arrangement, they illustrate various aspects of the mood and intention of the first essay. And so, since I must find a name, why should it not be THE JOYS OF FORGETTING?

Boars Hill, near Oxford
June 1, 1928

O. S.

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THE JOYS OF FORGETTING

THE JOYS OF FORGETTING

"I HAVE never known a fool," says Congreve's Mirabell, "but he affected to complain of his memory." More meaning is packed into that sentence than we can extract at a single glance. If it implies that all complaints about the memory are due to affectation, many of us will be obliged to dissent; but at least we may agree that such complaints, whether affected or sincere, are always foolish because they can do no good. Mnemonic splints, crutches, and wheel-chairs may alleviate the more distressing cases of forgetfulness, but there is no real cure. No man by taking thought can add a moment to his memory.

But there is another reason why complaints of this kind are heard usually in the mouths of fools: the law of compensation works nowhere more exactly or with greater beneficence than in this matter of remembering and forgetting . . . a fact which no fool can be expected to perceive. If a man cannot remember the names of pleasant acquaintances, he forgets the names of bores with equal facility. If he cannot trace the tangled history of Goethe's love affairs without omitting the names of a dozen women who

were once all-important, neither does he retain the nauseous details of yesterday's divorce suit, and so his thoughts are constantly running themselves free of defilement, like a mountain stream. He finds the present year more interesting because last year, in essentials so much the same, is already dim. Thus one who enjoys what is called a bad memory finds his life perpetually renewed and always wearing some hues of morning freshness. Far on into old age he sees with the just-awakened eyes of Miranda, and can still cry with her:

> O wonder!
> How many goodly creatures are there here!
> How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world!

It may be, however, that Mirabell was not thinking so much about the futility of these complaints and the fact that they ignore the law of compensation as about the indecent mental exposure, always the mark of a fool, which they involve. The laws of logic and of reason are mere social conventions thrust upon us willy-nilly by the outer world, and therefore it would be entirely proper for a man to bewail his inability to think straight—although, strange to say, no man ever does. It would be perfectly decent and modest, also, for one to complain at dinner-tables and in club-rooms that he has no common sense, but this, too, is rare. Something

in the nature of fools makes them focus public attention upon that very faculty about which a wise man is always most reticent, because it is so intensely personal. A man's memory is the man himself. One person differs from another primarily in this, that the holes in the bottom of what he calls his memory are punched in different places and are of a different size and number, so that different kinds and quantities of mental material slip through them into the dark reservoirs of the subconscious. "Tell me what you forget and I will tell you what you are," boasts the Freudian psychologist. But anyone can do this, and in plainest English. The man who is for ever telling us what he forgets is a fool—because he tells us.

Although it is usually idle to conjecture why the lightning of folly strikes in one place rather than another, perhaps we can guess why foolish people so often expose themselves in this particular way. They are vaguely aware that all the world loves a forgetter. That it does so is certain. Take the example of Coriolanus pleading in his hour of triumph for the release from captivity of a poor man who has been kind to him in other days. When the request is granted and he is asked for his benefactor's name, he claps his hand to his brow and exclaims, "By Jupiter! Forgot!" There is a

touch of nature, certainly, and our hearts warm to him. What the fool does not see, however, is that we love the forgetter in the act of forgetting rather than in that of tedious confession, and so his effort to ingratiate himself usually fails.

Perhaps the easiest way to meet the common opinion that a "poor memory" argues a poor mind is to cite a few examples. Erasmus was so unable to remember dates that we are uncertain even to-day about the year in which he was born. Montaigne, while admitting that his other mental faculties were "all very mean and ordinary," confidently asserted that his skill in forgetting was phenomenal and that he ought to be famous for it. And indeed, in one sense, he is so, for to this bad memory of his we owe nothing less than the Essays themselves, which were, to begin with, hardly more than memoranda. "For want of a natural memory," he says, "I have made one of paper." He admits that "a good memory is necessary to a liar," but thinks that an honest man or a scholar can do very well without it, and by his own showing he was both the one and the other. So, too, was brave old Joseph Glanville, he to whom we owe the legend of the Scholar Gipsy, who adds his sturdy word to this effect: "To boast a memory (the most that pedants can aim at) is but

an humble ostentation. 'Tis better to own a Judgment than a Memory like a Sepulchre furnished with a load of broken and discarnate bones." But would it not be better still, we may ask, to have both? According to the older psychology, at any rate, this is almost impossible, because the lower faculty crowds out the higher, as Pope declares:

> Thus in the soul while memory prevails,
> The solid power of understanding fails;
> Where beams of warm imagination play,
> The memory's soft figures melt away.

And so one might go on almost interminably with citations tending to show that weakness of memory is by no means inconsistent with even exceptional powers of mind. "Gladly disburden the memory of its hoarded treasures as old rubbish," says Emerson, and in his old age he exemplified the words by sitting down to read his own works with keen relish, under the impression that they had been written by some other man. Many of us have laughed at the account given by Bagehot of Henry Crabb Robinson's effort to remember the name of Matthew Arnold: "Probably the most able, and certainly the most consequential of all the young persons I know. You know which it is. The one with whom I could never presume to

be intimate. The one whose father I knew so many years." That story is amusing, no doubt, but the name of Henry Crabb Robinson is one that we shall remember at least as long as we do that of Walter Bagehot, who could never forget anything.

In reading such records as these the most arrant forgetter may well pluck up heart. It may be, of course, that the famous men I have mentioned discovered their contempt for good memories after they had found that their own were rather poor, but if we begin rejecting all philosophies that have been built up to explain and glorify the peculiarities philosophers have found in their own minds we shall soon make sad havoc. And there is always a chance that the grapes are really sour.

The fact must not be ignored that forgetting is just as truly a function of the mind as remembering, and that we could not remember anything unless we forgot a great deal more. Quite literally, in spite of the apparent paradox, a man's memory is what he forgets with. We are just now learning, moreover, that we think almost as much in terms of what we have forgotten as with what we remember. One's public mind, in which the furniture of indispensable fact is assembled, is like the atrium of a Roman house where the master transacted

business and met his friends; but most of one's real living goes on in the penetralia of consciousness, corresponding to the private chambers of the ancient home where the family gods held sway and fountains plashed in shady gardens. This seems to be true, at any rate, of deeper intellects. We praise Macaulay for his vast memory, but we might almost as well say of him that he was a poor forgetter, suggesting thereby a partial explanation of the superficiality of his thought. Great writers always seem to know just enough for their present purposes, and to carry no excess baggage. The words of Shakespeare come to us with so many vibrating overtones of significance not because he knew more than most men, in the ordinary sense of knowing, but because, in a way of speaking, he had forgotten more.

All music and pure poetry, it seems probable, are drawn up out of oblivion. The common stuff of every day sinks down there, lies for a time "forgotten," and then is brought back shining, as the sand-grain comes from the oyster a pearl. Or we might say that the facts a man holds on the surface of his mind ready for instant use are like the leaves of a tree, which make a brave show, to be sure, and help to tide the tree across the present season, but which must fall and decay before anything can

grow from them. The well-being and continued life of the tree depend as much upon the leaves of earlier years as upon those now green.

Our instinctive preference for people who forget readily is sound and easily explained. Observe, in the first place, that poor forgetters are always "dragging in some ill-conditioned fact," as Holmes complained, and so spoiling good talk. When you expect a thought from them, out comes a passage from the newspaper. A man who is remarkable for his memory seems to keep his entire intellectual stock in his front window, and there is no use in waiting for him to grope and rummage, because he has nothing hidden away anywhere. The forgetter, on the other hand, is always new and surprising, even to himself; he has fewer facts but many more ideas than the rememberer, and it is a joy to see him fish his thoughts up one after one out of his own depths, with a frank astonishment that he should contain such things. These men of four dimensions, whose thoughts we never exhaust, make the best talkers and the best friends. Their minds are not all foreground, and one can go exploring in them endlessly. Like Pater's Lady Lisa, they have had much practice in dying, but, like her again, they keep the colour and song of many a fallen day about them, and they alone are fit for immortality.

Heaven will certainly become a bore after a few millenniums to the man who remembers everything, but to the forgetter it should be an opportunity for numberless re-readings of old books, introductions to old acquaintances, hearing of old stories—really quite a charming place. So far as he is concerned there is no reason why it should not go on for ever.

And forgetters deserve the heaven so obviously intended for them alone. As Montaigne points out, they are all honest men, if only for Benjamin Franklin's reason. Consider also that some skill in forgetting is necessary to one of the highest moral virtues. "Forgive and forget," we say, not for the alliteration only, but because there is a real connection. There are several reasons why we prefer that our friends should forget at least as readily as we do, but the chief one is that we would not have them hold against us those unhappy far-off things which we ourselves dropped long since into oblivion. A naturally forgetful man cannot bear a grudge very long, as King Darius knew when he commissioned a special slave to bawl in his ears three times a day: "Sire, remember the Athenians!"

This is a part of what may be said for that involuntary forgetfulness with which we are all more or less endowed at birth, and with his

quantum of which, whether great or small, each of us must try to be content. Deliberate forgetting is another thing, at least equally beneficent, and susceptible, furthermore, of cultivation. It goes by several not quite synonymous names such as "leisure," "play," "escape," and the like, but it always consists in a temporary and more or less conscious rejection of many pressing and immediate matters in order to concentrate upon a few in which we find happiness and release. To enjoy quiet we must ignore much meaningless noise. We escape from the tyrannous present into the sheltering past with a sense of going home. We flee from discord and disarray into the ordered worlds of Mozart, Dante, Michael Angelo. All this is deliberate forgetting.

There has always been much in the world from which a wise man should simply turn away, at least for some part of his time—wrongs and miseries and follies that he can do nothing to correct and that stab him with pain whenever he recurs to them. In our time, as I know quite well, such turning away is commonly regarded as an act of cowardly weakness, but I take this view to be simply another sign of our deficient vitality. We have yet to learn that strength is shown at least as well by serenity and poise as in strenuous action. Why must we

be always on the march, and always armed cap-à-pie? He who doffs his armour now and then is certainly no less courageous than the man who sleeps in his.

The higher leisure of the Greek or Hindu sage is so far beyond our powers and comprehension that one would simply lose his breath in advocating or even describing it. If we, in the modern and Western world, are ever to approach that ideal, we must do so by short and easy steps accommodated to our present condition. Before we can attain to "high seriousness" we must cease to be merely "sober-sided," anxious, and everlastingly preoccupied with "problems." What we still need far more than moral exhortation is further schooling in the polite pleasures. First of all we must learn to laugh—perhaps at sheer nonsense to begin with—and then to play, even with trivial things. For the way out of that unhappy adult childishness into which we have fallen seems to run through the country of actual childhood, although there will be no need to pause there long. Once we have learned to laugh and play as children do, not with any spoil-sport purpose of "keeping fit," but for the sake of play and laughter, we may go on to something more worthy of grown men and women—to the play of mind, for example, in which we have always

been woefully awkward, and from which it is only a step to the arts, to the peace of nature, and to the great quietness of the past. Thus, little by little, we may win our way up to the true leisure, which is not really forgetting at all, but an escape from the lower into a higher reality.

To the practical question, then, how we are to deal with this blatant world that hums and buzzes so confusedly about us all, one practical answer is quite clear: we should forget most of it. Simple ignorance will help a good deal in such an effort and the laws of thought will attend to more, yet there will always be left a large field for deliberate and intelligent forgetting. Duty as well as pleasure urges every man to assert his intellectual independence by building up, bit by bit, a fortress of the mind in which he can be at peace. At first he may use it chiefly for defence, but eventually he may sally forth to do at least as good service in the world as those who live always in the open.

These inner strongholds of thought and dream will be of many different kinds, for everyone must use the building materials that lie at hand. The poet makes one sort, the musician another, and the philosopher a third. Take, for a familiar example, Keats's *Ode to a Grecian Urn*, considered with reference to what

it omits. The poem leaves out most if not quite all of the unhappiness of the youth who wrote it—the misery of the London hospitals he was walking, his poverty, his apparent failure as poet, his premonition of an early death. We can read these things between the lines, of course, and yet it is a little masterpiece in forgetting. Few of us can hope to build a fortress like that one, a defence not only for the builder but for millions of others who take refuge there, yet there are many other kinds that require less constructive genius. And if one can build nothing whatever, still the historic past lies open to us all, and it is an inexhaustible country, safe and quiet and secluded, full of winding paths of our own making—in spite of all the cruelty and pain that once filled it, now almost a perfect place for amateurs in forgetting.

Best of all for this kind of retreat, however, is one's own past when it has been selected and arranged and glorified by the alchemy of recollection; for we may certainly include among the joys of forgetting even the pleasures of memory themselves. A few seconds ago, as I was writing these lines, there came to me a vivid mental picture of an inn beside the Adur in Sussex, where I sat at breakfast some months ago looking out at the river that flowed just beneath my window. In this picture I saw the

river shining silver-green in the early sunlight, but a reference to the map of Sussex will show, I think, that where the Adur flows through the village of Bramber it is very near the sea and consequently tidal. As a matter of fact, then, the water that I saw was not silver-green at all but a brownish-grey. Memory and forgetting, working cheerfully together, had stained the water in the colours of the South Downs over which I walked all day after that breakfast by the stream. Not being a professional geographer and having no practical designs of any sort upon the River Adur, I feel indebted to them both.

This kind of impassioned recollection, praised by Rousseau and his innumerable progeny, is really, I repeat, one of the best kinds of forgetting. It drops out the tidal mud and substitutes the green and silver of fancy. The moments of one's own past upon which there slant down special beams of glory are the best retreats one can find, and the multiplication of them, the frequent return to and the improvement of them, is one of the main secrets of happiness. There is an expression of face, withdrawn and absorbed yet not morose, which should apprise us that this and that man or woman has a mental hinterland, a spiritual base of supplies. Such people are forgetters.

The mention of Rousseau is enough to remind us that this whole doctrine of forgetting is tinged, or tainted, with Romanticism. Indeed, it *is* Romanticism; and this means, I am afraid, that it cannot be deeply true or permanently satisfying. Forgetting is by no means a lofty ideal but only, in such times as ours, a necessity. I admit that if we were quite sane and sound, if we lived in a world more attuned to our deepest natures than the one we have about us, we should not need to maintain these avenues of retreat, we should not look to nature for escape or to art for anodynes. Athens in her great years developed no theory or practice of escape. As things stand with us, however, the best procedure for those who would convert forgetters—and I divulge the secret without hesitation—is to provide them with a present which a wise man would wish at all times to remember. Until considerable progress is made on this programme they will continue to forget as much as they can. Art will be to them a means of flight from the actual instead of what it should be, a penetration of it; nature will be dearer in many moods than man and woman and the past will often seem nearer than the present; books will be their hashish and opium. When all else fails, many of them will continue, I fear, to buy

forgetfulness in bottles and by the ounce, for those who would block these avenues of escape have not sufficiently considered the dreariness of the alternative. Oblivion will continue to scatter her poppy, and the "iniquity" of this, which I am far from denying, will not be hers.

We have seen, then, that forgetters are honest men and charitable, that from their ranks are drawn most poets and musicians and philosophers, that they are beloved by all who know them and are alone destined for everlasting joy for the sufficient reason that they are happy here on earth. What more? Well, perhaps this is enough to say for them, lest we should seem to claim too much. But if even these moderate assertions are true, and if the argument supporting them is not a mere crying of "sour grapes" or an attempt to make the worse appear the better reason, then certainly no one should ever complain of his memory again. Sensible people will resolve rather to forget with Coriolanus and Emerson and Montaigne than to remember with Cassius and Iago.

If there is anyone so hardened in folly that he still considers forgetting a curse, only one lesson, and that far more severe than nature often inflicts, might cure him. Suppose that

some day, after his thousandth complaint, he should be taken at his word, and that a small part of what he has forgotten should be suddenly dumped into his conscious mind. There would be a swift flapping of wings out of all his past; ten million faces would surge up from darkness into a dreadful glare; a vast murmur of voices would gather out of silence and swell and grow until it had built Pandemonium under the dome of his skull. In that sea of faces he would not find the few that had been dear to him. Voices he had loved would be drowned in vapid chatter. The few good books he had read would be smothered under the ten thousand bad. Worst of all, he would search in vain among the trivialities, the broken purposes, and the weak surrenders of his own past for that ideal self of which his bad memory had allowed him complaisantly to dream. In the agony of such a moment he would cry out for poppy and mandragora, for the least cool drop of Lethe, and when the torture had passed I think he would build a new altar to the high and blessed gods of oblivion.

IRISHMEN are of three kinds: policemen, politicians, and poets. One reason for the preponderance of the last group is that the politicians and policemen mostly emigrate to America, while the poets usually remain at home. A main bond of union in the poetic party is a vigorous detestation of the other two, and one might almost say that if it were not for this common antipathy there would hardly exist anything recognizable as an Irish School. For there are Irish poets who, in defiance of Matthew Arnold, make no display of "mysticism" and "natural magic"; there are a good number of others who show not a glint of humour; there are even some who do not affect a wilful obscurity; but there are none who have not an instinctive horror of the hustings and the police-court. By their hates ye shall know them.

The reasons are not far to seek. From the time of Hadrian to that of Viscount French the Celts of the British Isles were policed and governed to the utter verge of despair. Volatile, imaginative, ill-organized, violent rather than strong, they fell long ago under the sway of a

far more phlegmatic race—a race devoted to routine and to regulating other people and to hard-hitting. Their history for these thousand years has been, therefore, a history of flight—into the mountains of Wales, into Brittany, and across the Irish Channel; but they have never quite escaped from "those strong feet that followed, followed after." And when at last there was no further geographical refuge left, what could they do but take to the "viewless wings of poesy"? Once they were finally caged, what could they do but sing?

Not too seriously speaking, this may be considered an explanation of the recent literary movement which we called the Neo-Celtic Revival. In order to comprehend and sympathize with an Irish poet one should keep in mind the visual image of a pursuing policeman. To understand Irish poetry we should regard it as a tapestry woven by many hands to hide the gaunt outlines of the gallows and the jail. Erin's Harp, already a most appropriate national emblem, might be significantly quartered with a shillelagh.

The poetry of Ireland has always been a poetry of escape and of forgetting. Even without the Romantic Movement it would have been that, but Romanticism is itself precisely the mood or frame of mind which is for ever

seeking untried avenues of flight away from the familiar into the unknown. Here, then, are two lines of force moving out of quite different quarters but converging, and when both are brought to bear upon one individual we may expect a remarkable result. Lord Dunsany is such a result. We may think of him as either the most Irish of poets or as the most audaciously romantic of Romanticists. Perhaps he is both.

Lord Dunsany has had a glimpse over one shoulder of two terrifying giants whose names are Here and Now. He does not stop, like Shelley, for example, and try to convert them from cannibalism; he does not even revile them from a distance like Leopardi; he simply runs away. And although it may be said without disparagement of Irish courage that this is a very Irish thing to do, no other of Erin's thousand poets has ever escaped so completely as he has from these terrible twins or built so impregnable a fortress against them. He leaves behind both modern and ancient Ireland, and even that enchanted region of legend in which so many of his fellows have lingered. He would not deny that some fine gold of fancy is to be found there, but he probably thinks it too much encumbered with the baser metals of fact. Almost any day the archæologist's pick-

axe may unearth the actual palace of Conchobar or go crashing through the skull of Cuchullan. Indefatigable Germans and prying Frenchmen are already at work on Irish myth, determined to unearth the last relic of the shadowy past and to leave no shelter for a poet's head.

Learning a sad wisdom from the experience of his race, Lord Dunsany is determined to flee far enough, to gather miles and meridians enough about him so as to be free for a lifetime from politicians and policemen and professors, from bill-boards and yellow journalism and all the spreading stain of commercialized ugliness. He is the prince of contemporary forgetters, having made a clean sweep of the whole modern world and of all trivial fond records that have been written in the history of two thousand years. One lobe of his brain, to be sure, is aware of the modern world and has brought him through the stench and squalor of two great wars; but whenever he is free to choose his way he strides rapidly back through history, past Cæsar and Agamemnon, past Karnak and Heliopolis, to a still place hidden behind the years, "older than Always." The worth of his plays and tales varies inversely as the square of their distance from our world of every day. He lives by preference in a glimmer-

ing land where only he has ever been, where all the wars were fought to a finish long ago, where shadowy people dwell together in peace under the benignant tyranny of his imagination. Something like this is what Irish poets have always wanted, and Lord Dunsany, although he is Norman in blood, is the most Irish of them all.

As for the Romantic tradition, he may seem to close a vista there also. Delight in solitude, love for the remote in time and space, the "devotion to something afar from the sphere of our sorrow"—these are main characteristics of the Romantic mood and of his writing as well. Romanticism might be defined, if we were not so tired of defining it, as the practice and theory of forgetting. Always and everywhere we find it struggling to escape from a present time or place into some fustian country, some Land of Cockayne or of chimera, in which a haughty, self-centred, undisciplined imagination may feel at ease. Pushing the frontiers of fancy always before it, the Romantic imagination on the quest of freedom has now almost exhausted available time and space. To the Elizabethan Romanticists of action mere voyages of discovery were sufficient, and Richard Hakluyt was the Dunsany of their day; but Lieutenant Peary and Captain Scott

have reduced the dreams of Frobisher and Drake to geographical prose. Coleridge's caravel of fantasy came to earth in Xanadu, a place one might locate within a thousand miles on any good map, and since the explorations of Sir Francis Younghusband no poet goes there any more. Shelley discovered and colonized the sky for poetry and Keats the undersea, but they lived before the age of the aeroplane and the submarine. Thus science goes on crowding a certain kind of poetry off the map, not because the intrusion of fact need really be hostile to poetry but because a certain kind of poet thinks it is. His feeling is phrased for ever in Keats's words:

> There was an awful rainbow once in heaven:
> We know her woof, her texture; she is given
> In the dull catalogue of common things.

In one way of considering, there are only two great classes of artists: those who help us to a clearer and fuller knowledge of the world we live in and those who lead us away from that world. This is hardly the place in which to point out that the former group is by very much more important, or that the latter has been in recent decades—indeed, for over a century—much the more numerous. We know very well, and on the proper occasion can

insist, that imagination has a nobler work to do than that of floating us away from reality. In a time so exacting and complex as ours, however, and in a period so tawdry with the vulgar gewgaws of wealth, so cluttered by the childish mechanical toys of industrialized science, what wonder that we should now and then lose or ignore our critical sense and turn with gratitude to those "who simply tell the most heart-easing things?" This is neither a bracing nor a sound attitude toward art, but in certain moods of weariness or disgust, when the raucous tyrannical world has been "too much with us late and soon," it happens to be inevitable. There comes a time when further pain can teach us nothing more, when continued fortitude in the face of the chaotic present seems to have no further value—and then, when we are ready for any anodyne that may be at hand, we hear the call of these secondary artists, the forgetters:

> Outworn heart in a time outworn,
> Come clear of the nets of wrong and right;
> Laugh, heart, again, in the grey twilight,
> Sigh, heart, again, in the dew of the morn.

That is the time for Lord Dunsany. Of course, there are many other guides, for modern "progress" has reached such a pass that

nine-tenths of our artists have no other purpose than to draw us away from progress and help us to forget it; but you will hardly find a guide who can lead you farther than this Irish myth-maker. He has constructed a complete cosmology all his own. Mighty mountain ranges are stretched along the borders of his dream, and mighty rivers shine here and there in it, rolling down to perilous seas. In that world successive pantheons of gods quite normally violent and absurd have conquered and ruled and been forgotten, and there are many idols, many men, and hardly any women. The dream is completely furnished with strange birds, trees, metals, flowers, and with jewels of incredible beauty and impossibly delectable names—jewels so precious that each of them has assigned to it a special historian who does nothing all his life but explore and record its history. Remarkable beasts prowl through the jungles of this dream. There is Tharagavverug, for example, with a heart made of bronze, and Wong Bongerok with the scorpion tail, besides the more common "dragons, griffins, hippogriffins, and the different species of gargoyle." But it is not the strangeness or the beauty of these creatures that astonishes so much as the profusion, for this dreamer is as prolific as the tropical jungle itself. He strikes out forms and

images with the cheerful ease of a young god in the experimental stages of creation. Ignoring the opinion of all the savants that the work of myth-making was ended long ago, and that in any case it can be done only by concerted and protracted effort of whole races, he sets about to people the forgotten past and the empty sky in just the serene care-free way of the best-authenticated dreamers, who have always made their gods in their own image. He is, in fact, the foremost modern myth-maker, with Shelley as his nearest rival.

Shelley's dreams are seldom quite self-confident because his sleep is not sufficiently deep or long enough sustained. The pain of his recent wounds disturbs him, and he is afraid of waking. But although the present world has suggested something to Lord Dunsany, although he shows by an ironic reference here and there that he retains some vague recollections of the twentieth century, his dream is really independent, globed, complete. In the sensible way of all good myth-makers he concerns himself entirely with the Long Ago. So old are the cities and gods and men of which he tells us that only he has ever dreamed about them, and even he "may not be sure that his dreams are true." (What a disarming modesty in that admission! If only a few more of our

myth-makers and god-creators had confessed as much, what seas of blood and tears might have been saved!) He escapes into time, or rather out of it, for the simple reason that all the geographical avenues of escape are now charted, policed, macadamized. His world lies safe and still on the other side of the ages. The marble towers of Babbulkund have rested quietly under innumerable drums and tramplings, and the wonderful sword of Welleran has long been rust. He deals with time as Milton did with starry space, and the most thrilling figure in his tales, indeed, is that of Time, destined devourer of worlds and gods and men —yes, and even of dreams. It is because this dreadful protagonist is so constantly present to his thought that most of his plays and stories are tragedies. Like all Romanticists, he is obsessed by the thought of evanescence and decay, and like them he strives to escape from the universal flux, not by rising to a sense of higher reality, in Plato's way, but by horizontal flight into a land of chimera. The expedient has never proved permanently successful, for Time knows that land, too, and he is there before us.

For the description of his dream-world Lord Dunsany has struck out a style and a literary form for which it is hard to find suitable names because they have had so few analogues

in literature. Maurice de Guérin's *Centaure*, the prose poems of Turgénev, De Quincey's *Dream Fugues*, or such a thing as Poe's *Silence* may have suggested the form, but only in a vague way. Dunsany's prose tales are not short stories, and they are not fables, but something between. The basis of their technic lies in the psychology of dreams, and the faults of that technic—weakness of structural cohesion and frequent failure in climax—are the technical faults, so to speak, of dreams also. But though the origins of this form and style are obscure, the effects aimed at and secured were foreshadowed long ago in one of the most brilliant of English critical essays, *The Decay of Lying*. One imagines how Oscar Wilde would have gloried in the audacious mendacity of this last of the æsthetes. Dunsany agrees with Wilde's assertion that "the only beautiful things are the things which do not concern us," that art should be "a veil rather than a mirror," and that its chief aim should be a sort of gorgeous prevarication.

The effect of antiquity in Dunsany's writing is not that of the best Hellenic period—in which, of course, there is really no antiquity whatever—but of the Alexandrian, and yet he has some qualities that remind us, at least, of supreme classic art. For one thing, he centres

attention upon fundamental emotions, giving no exaggerated importance to the theme of love and treating it, if at all, in a way that seems to most modern readers, saturated as they are likely to be with literary aphrodisiacs, somewhat cold and distant. Compassion is not found in his world, or any other of the altruistic emotions which owe their modern development chiefly to Christian influence. His characteristic effects are usually connected in some way with fear, the most trenchant and overwhelming of the emotions and perhaps the oldest, which has been generally neglected by the poets of our comfortable modern world. He reminds us of what fear once meant to human beings, and perhaps can never mean again, by personifying its aspects in the fashion of primitive minds. He brings before us, for example, the terrible nightmare of Pestilence, prowling at first in darkness about the homes of men and then, growing bolder, snapping at their throats as they walk in broad daylight, until it grows strong enough to leap into the air and bring down flying birds in its poisonous claws. He can suggest depths of horror by a single image: "Heavy two-footed creatures pad through the night on paws." He can terrify the fancy by a single word: "Sometimes some monster of the river *coughed*." Nearly all these effects are made

by suggestion rather than by delineation, and they achieve now and then something like the terror of nightmare because Dunsany knows to a nicety the expressiveness of silence. When Leothric gazed for the first time upon the hostile fortress of Gaznak, there looked out at him from the windows, the poet says, "things of which I shall not speak."

But the pure note of the primitive is a thing excessively rare which we need not expect to find even in an Irish poet. What we get from Lord Dunsany is not the simple faith of the ancient myth-maker, but something subtler and far more complex. His dreams are those of a mind half-way between asleep and awake, and thus the doubts and scepticisms of the modern mind are thrown up very clearly against a background of childlike belief, making an effect of exceptional richness for which the closest analogue is to be found, perhaps, in the dialogues of Lucian. The clearest mark of what little modernity there is in him is seen in his scorn for modern things. He suffers with the modern disease of agoraphobia, an intense hatred of great cities and all their works. In the Land of Dunsany there is not one business man or bill-board or office-building to be found, but "very small are all its pleasant cities, and the people thereof bless one another by name

as they pass in the streets." In short, Lord Dunsany seems to turn history upside down, for his mind is that of a late and half-romantic ancient with glints of modernity shining through. Even his humour, which is abundant though never obtrusive, has usually an archaic flavour. In one of the most meandering of his tales he asks a dream sentinel why all the dwellers in a certain dream city are asleep, and receives the answer: "None may ask questions in this gate for fear they may wake the people of the city. For when the people of the city wake, the gods will die. And when the gods die, men may dream no more." In this delightfully vicious circle there is something Hibernian, to be sure, but the sarcasm, when taken with all its devastating implications, is one of which Lucian himself would have been proud.

Although we live in an age of prose, it is probably a greater distinction nowadays—perhaps it has always been—to be the master of an excellent prose style than to be able to write good verse. And it may be seen some day as Lord Dunsany's chief merit that he has helped to revive in a time of prose proletarians the aristocratic traditions of the past. He writes a style which is at once strange and natural, full of idiosyncrasy but not eccentric.

The most remarkable thing about Dunsany's prose is its subtle use of rhythm. His prose cadences are comparable only with the *cursus* of ancient orators and of the Roman Catholic and Anglican liturgies, from which they may possibly have been derived; but they seem quite spontaneous. No analysis of the rhythms of Isocrates or Cicero or Jeremy Taylor ever gave the clue to such verbal cadenzas as this: "And he commended my soul to the care of his own gods, to his little lesser gods, the humble ones, to the gods that bless Belzoond." Not since the time of De Quincey and his "sweet funeral bells from some incalculable distance" has English heard so seductive a music. When one has read the words four or five times over he has woven a charm from which he will not soon escape. There is a perfection of form, apparently casual and unsought, in that series of sounds which goes beyond the majestic but somewhat too architectural beauty of the great sentence in Johnson's letter to Lord Chesterfield. One must admit, of course, that Dunsany's rhythms often circle into eddies of scannable metre, as in the passage: "And apart from the things that were done there, the trees themselves were a warning, and did not wear the wholesome look of those that we plant ourselves." This is a fault of excess, and it is

carried much farther in some of Dunsany's later books, where whole pages may be read as fairly regular hexameter. As a usual thing, however, the metrical passage is so short as not to disturb the even flow of the prose, which loops smoothly out again into the current of slightly stressed rhythms. Many magical effects are secured by this mixture of plain prose with rhythmed prose and with metre. All three are combined in the following passage, which is nevertheless one rhythmic unit: "When spring has fallen upon the days of summer, I carry away with mournful joy at night petal by petal the rhododendron's bloom. No lit procession of purple kings is nigh so fair as that. No beautiful death of well-beloved men hath such a glory of forlornness."

Now it may be said that English readers, and writers of English still more, will do well to stop their ears against such Siren music, and certainly there is something exotic, something foreign to the best English tradition, possibly something a trifle meretricious in these cadences. There is really little danger, however, that such effects as these will ever become too prevalent in the writings of other men, for the very few who might be able to do such things would be afraid. Almost without exception the prose-writers of our time are literary

sansculottes, and they may be depended upon to reject with all the violence of a plebeian bigotry any style that rises above the journalistic humdrum. They write for the eye, and are content to be read by the eye alone. We may be fairly sure, in fact, that the cult of gracelessness which has already destroyed the beauty of costume and is going on to wreck the beauty of manners will last through our time, and that it will preserve the English *sermo pedestris* in much its present state. Those who care for such things, therefore, may enjoy the prose of Lord Dunsany with an easy conscience, and may be glad that one man in our time can write such a passage as this: "With a sound like tinkling bells, far off in a land of shepherds hidden by some hill, the waters of many fountains turned again home."

And, after all, we need not labour to excuse or explain what may seem the dangerous beauty of Lord Dunsany's prose, for it is only the music that must always sound in the gate of forgetting, the music that charms us into a "temporary suspension of disbelief" and lulls us into a brief oblivion of the outer world. This is a language proper and justifiable enough in one who has done much to bring about that renaissance of wonder in which, according to the prophecy of Oscar Wilde, "dragons will

wander about the waste places and the phœnix will soar from her bed of fire." As though he had seen in a vision the Land of Dunsany itself, Wilde promises that in that day "we shall lay our hands upon the basilisk and see the jewel in the toad's head. Champing his gilded oats, the Hippogriff will stand in our stalls, and over our heads will float the Bluebird, singing of beautiful impossible things, of things that are lovely and that never happen, of things that are not and that should be."

KNIGHT OF THE LOVING HEART

SAMUEL PICKWICK, ESQUIRE,
At the "George and Vulture,"
George Yard, Lombard Street,
London.

HONOURED SIR,

It is with sincere pleasure, not unmingled with a sense of duty long deferred, that I take up my pen to write these grateful lines. The thought of your great fame shall not deter me, for that fame itself is partly due to the benignancy shown in all your dealings with your fellow-men; it was won as much by your kindliness which encouraged the diffident as by your dignity which rebuked the presumptuous. No man who has achieved a renown comparable with yours has ever remained more affable in the midst of honours or has preserved more perfectly the common touch. When I recall how gladly you conversed with coachmen and ostlers, how willing you always were to sit down to a discussion with any man and how reluctant always to rise, the hesitation I should otherwise feel in addressing you is seen to have no place. Even from a devout admirer

who lifts up what has been called "the foolish face of praise" you will manage to learn something.

Now that I think of it, this insatiable eagerness to learn, this inveterate delight of yours in seeing or hearing some new thing, is not the least of the many charms that have endeared you to so many hearts. For most of us there comes a time when the windows of the soul are darkened and the evil days draw nigh when we shall say that we have no pleasure in them, but you have never known this fading of delight; you have kept the innocent eye and heart which alone lie open to the incursions of wonder. For most of us everything near and familiar is already commonplace, so that we shall never really learn anything again, but for you, because you have always expected the marvellous, miracles blossom on every hand. All the world remembers how, "on the morning of the thirteenth of May, one thousand eight hundred and twenty-seven," you burst like another sun from your slumbers, threw open your chamber window, and looked out upon the world beneath. Just so we must see you always, looking forth at dawn from a just-opened window upon a world new-made.

This eagerness for learning, and this love of things new and strange, is the trait which con-

nects you most closely with another London citizen, Mr. Samuel Pepys, who also kept a notebook and whose insatiable curiosity has won him a fame far less than yours, indeed, but still considerable. For him as for you the world seemed to be made afresh on each new morning. Mighty London, with its innumerable faces strange and familiar, with its numberless hands to grasp and minds to pick and hearts to love, was for both of you a treasury of wonders over which you pored year in and year out with a sort of mild amazement. Of course, I know that there were many differences between you--was there not a Mistress Pepys, for example?—but the likenesses are more numerous and striking. What an extraordinary coincidence that your first names should have been the same, and your initials as well! May I respectfully suggest that this curious fact seems worthy of a jotting in your notebook, and perhaps of a special communication to the Club?

Your fame, however, Mr. Pickwick, challenges comparison not with that of so obscure a person as Samuel Pepys but with the supreme reputations. I realize, indeed, that I am addressing one of the most famous men of all time. Alexander the Great had a certain celebrity, but we do not find his exploits

pictured upon wall-papers and table-cloths as yours have long been; Julius Cæsar was well known, but we cannot be sure what he looked like; Napoleon made a considerable stir in his time, but few have ever fallen in love with him; Shakespeare we often mention, but we cannot guess what he had for breakfast. Your name belongs in a different class. Books have been written about the inns at which you lodged, about the coaches you rode in, and about the routes you travelled through England. Your name has given the English language an adjective. I know a boy of twelve who can recite page after page from the written record of your words and deeds and who frequently does so, in and out of season. This, Sir, is fame.

Yet there are one or two other men who have attained a celebrity not unlike your own. For some obscure reason, or perhaps for no reason at all, I think of you in connection with a certain lean old knight of La Mancha, one Don Quixote, of whom it may well be that you have never heard, and together also with another knight of your own England, familiarly known as Jack Falstaff, in whom, with your great catholic charity, you would have found much to admire and marvel at as well as something, it may be, to deplore. These two have

grown upon the hearts and thoughts of men year by year as you have, towering above the books that record them and living like myths and legends in the common memory of mankind. By virtue of a more intense vitality than is ever given to mortals, these two stand apart, and you are of their company. So sure am I that you belong with the Knight of the Dolorous Visage and the Knight of the Gambolling Wit that I should like to dub you, with this accolade of the pen, "Sir Samuel Pickwick, the Knight of the Loving Heart."

Some of the more belligerently democratic of your admirers would object, no doubt, to the implication that there was any touch of aristocracy in your essentially middle-class nature, but to these I should recommend a consideration of your chivalric bearing throughout the trying episode with the Lady in Yellow Curl-Papers and also of the impetuosity, the complete forgetfulness of self, with which you rushed to the defence of threatened virtue at Bury St. Edmunds. Thinking of these events and of many others of the like nature, I see nothing grotesque in my association of you with the best traditions of chivalry and with heroes of old romance. Invoices and bills of lading were more familiar to you, I know, than the tomes of chivalric lore on which the Spanish Don fed

his fancy, but your knighthood had no need of books because it was innate. Without ever reading a line of Chaucer, you attained the virtues of his ideal knight, "trouthe and honour, fredom and curteisye." I place you beside Don Quixote because of your lofty idealism and because your guileless heart, like his, has never taken the stain of the world. I would give you the companionship of Sir John Falstaff, than which I know none better, because you have his almost reverent gratitude for creature comforts and because, although not witty in yourself, you have been most abundantly "the cause that wit is in other men." Like Lancelot of old you have ridden about England in quest of noble adventure, righting wrongs on every hand and succouring the distressed. To the boldness of Sir Bedevere you have joined the gentleness of Arthur and the courtesy of Gawain, adding to all a magnanimity almost beyond comparison, as in your final beneficence to the repentant Job and Jingle.

If it were possible, Sir, to say any more than this of any man, that "he was a verray parfit gentil knight," I should like to speak of your supreme faculty for winning and holding affection, not of those many alone who had the privilege of your personal acquaintance but that

also of all the numberless millions who have ever heard of you. It is a pleasure merely to recall a few of your admirers whose names we know. Every member of the original Pickwick Club (with the possible exception of the disgruntled Mr. Blotton of Aldgate), Squire Wardle and his entire family, Mr. Bob Sawyer and Mr. Ben Allen, the Man with the Brown Paper Parcel and the Lady in Yellow Curl-Papers, the Wellers, Senior and Junior, the total population of Fleet Prison, even Mr. Jingle and Mr. Trotter and Mrs. Bardell—each and all came soon or late to feel towards you the liveliest sentiments of gratitude and personal fidelity. One is confident that long ere this even Dodson and Fogg and the truculent Sergeant Buzfuz himself have been added to your following. For it is clear that although men might disagree with you, might argue and contend with you, might even plot and conspire and go to law against you, they could not possibly help loving you. And when they saw that your charity was only increased by ill-usage and vituperation, saw that your radiant good will shone all the brighter in adversity and burst into a positive flame of loving-kindness when they had shut you behind prison bars, their love was deepened into a respect little short of veneration.

Such universal affection as this in which you are held, Mr. Pickwick, is given only to those who live closest to the common heart of humanity. It is extended to those who do the things we should like to have done and who thereby fulfil our dreams. You carry out our phantom ephemeral lives for us in the kingdoms of poetry which they can never reach, and so give them at least a semblance of rounded reality which by themselves they could not have attained. The boy that lingers on in every man cries out to the deathless boy in you —to the serious yet madcap boy well stricken in years who has earned an interminable holiday and has kept the innocence that can enjoy it. At one glare from your circular spectacles the grisly phantom of old age, so terrible to other men, shrinks away abashed. You commit our follies for us, O beneficent and indispensable Sir—the delicious but costly follies which we can no longer afford because we are grown up now and have positions to maintain in society. While remaining always eminently respectable, as becomes a retired merchant of London, you have always held respectability in its subordinate and relatively unimportant place, as we should do if we dared. You say the frivolous and foolish things that sometimes tremble even now upon the tips of our tongues,

but go unuttered because they have come to seem beneath what we call our dignity. Thanks! A thousand thanks! Because you are gay and high-hearted we find it a little easier to be serious and responsible. We go about our sober routine more cheerfully because we know and can never doubt that Mr. Pickwick and his meiny are still posting up and down England on their quest of high adventure.

"Are still posting up and down," I say, for if there is one thing more certain than another about this quest of yours it is that it can never end. There are a very few lives known to us, of which number your own is one, that must go on for ever because there are no germs of mortality in them, no crevices of corruption upon which Death can lay his clutch. We transitory creatures whose days are but a span must think of you as one of the few immortals, and in comparison with your vital reality we are but the figments of a feeble dream. A young man by the name of Charles Dickens—of whom, again, it is unlikely that you have ever heard—has given the world some account of your early adventures, basing his narrative upon the posthumous papers of the Pickwick Club. His book is in many ways a good book and I should not like to say or imply anything against it, but I may at least point out, in the

first place, that he was barely four-and-twenty —hardly older, that is, than Mr. Winkle— when the book was written, and, in the second place, that he deals with no more than one year and three months out of your now completed century of experience. Twenty-four years of age! One year and three months! No one can fail to see how inadequate this brief and immature record of your exploits must be. You have risen, like Don Quixote and Sir John Falstaff, out of the book that records you and have walked abroad among the hearts of men in your own strength. As yet, however, we have not found, and we may never find, the titanic pen that can bring your adventures down to date.

I address these lines to the "George and Vulture" not because I have forgotten that you bought and occupied a house in Dulwich after the Fleet Prison episode, but because I am sure that no suburban villa could keep you long from the road. There must have been a day, not many months after you settled down in that snug seclusion, when some tale of oppression read in the newspaper or some rumour of wrong done to the weak and helpless startled you broad awake, and then there must have followed the brisk command: "Sam, pack my portmanteau." And this would

lead on to all that has happened since. I am certain, however, that the landlord of your old inn will know where to send this letter.

You will be glad to learn, if you do not know, that the "George and Vulture," unlike most of the inns made famous by your patronage, is still worthy of its noble past. Honest English fare may still be had there, an ale rather better than we now deserve, and such a surge and press of good companions as would delight your heart. This one tiny islet of permanence stands firm even to-day, surrounded as it is by the sea of change, and I think there is no place where we come closer to you than in that upper room which is kept sacred to your memory.

But, Sir, wherever you may now be sheltering from the light of your vast fame, upon whatever "adventure brave and new" your great powers are now engaged, I beg that you will accept the gratitude and greetings of one who has been for many years enrolled among the hundred millions of your admiring lovers.

O. S.

THE NATURAL HISTORY OF HOBBY-HORSES

When dealing with serious topics such as this it is always well, I find, to begin with careful definitions, hoping that they will lend one's discourses an air of exact scholarship which is often difficult to secure in any other way. I turn, therefore, to my largest dictionary, a constant recourse in such exigencies, and under the term "hobby-horse" I read as follows:

"One of the principal performers in a morris-dance, having a figure of a horse made of wicker-work supported about his waist, and his feet concealed by a housing. He performs antics imitating the motions of a horse, and various juggling tricks."

This is enlightening, so far as it goes, for it reveals the ancestry of the contemporary animal and suggests an explanation of some of his habits. But there is more: "A person who acts in a foolish, subservient manner." That definition is less to my purpose, and so is the next one: "A wooden figure of a horse, usually provided with rockers, for children to ride on." But now at last, having vindicated his erudition, the lexicographer comes to the point and

gives me what I am seeking: "A favourite pursuit or topic: now commonly hobby. See hobby[1], *n.* 3." Having learned implicit obedience to all such commands, I *do* "see hobby[1], *n.* 3," and this is what I find there: "Any favourite object, pursuit, or topic; that which a person persistently pursues or dwells upon with zeal or delight, as if riding a horse."

Now it is this particular kind of hobby-horse, this hobby[1], *n.* 3, of which I wish to speak in the following brief and inadequate treatise. In doing so I shall be breaking virgin soil, for the natural history of this beast has never been discussed before.

Although I have begun in the most approved method of scholarly exposition and propose to continue in the same style, it seems unnecessary to pursue the hobby backward into the dawn of time until we find him, tiny and nimble and three-toed, trampling the crepuscular jungles of the Eocene. Strictly speaking, he has no more palæontology than the horse proper, originally about as equine in appearance as a jack-rabbit, and neither of these animals is entitled to the name of horse until he becomes rideable. Now the fact seems to be that the hobby did not attain a bulk to be readily bestridden until very recent times, and for that reason I shall leave the description of the

fossil, the prehistoric, the *Ur*-hobby to those who would rather appear learned than be helpfully practical.

What hobby-horses were stabled in ancient Mesopotamia, at Baalbec, or in the pillared courts of the Pharaohs would admit a wide conjecture, but history is so silent about them all that one suspects it has none to tell of. Speaking in general, there is no argument from silence, yet silence about hobby-horses is so extraordinary that it must seem significant. By the same token we may well doubt whether the hobby played an important part in Greece or Rome, for Homer does not mention him and Virgil gives him not a single line, even in the *Georgics*. He has no place in the zoologies of Ctesias, Aristotle, Ælian, Pliny, Strabo, Philes, and Aldrovandus, although each of these gathered into his net every beast that had ever been seen or even heard of. Realizing this, one begins to marvel, and races down the centuries to Edward Topsell's *History of Four-footed Beastes*. Surely we shall find our quarry in this vast and hospitable tome! But no. The Reverend Topsell finds room for such rare quadrupeds as the Yale, with horns pointing fore and aft, for the Alce and the Autolops and the barely credible Amphisbæna—the snake with a head at both ends—and for several

species and sub-species of Unicorns, but he has no word for the Hobby-horse. Why this discrimination? Is it due to some conspiracy of silence? I tend rather to the belief that the silence of all these learned men upon our topic is attributable to the extreme rarity of hobby-horses in their times.

We should consider that the hobby-horse, as we know him, is by no means a tough pachydermatous beast that can be left outdoors to shift for himself, like a rhinoceros, in all climates and weathers. His organism is delicate, sensitive, like that of any other thoroughbred, and he needs constant attention. As well might you expect to find lap-dogs in Lapland as to see this refined animal thriving in a rude and brutal age. His temporal habitat is very restricted, and he had to wait for ages while it was being prepared for his advent. In order that he might feel comfortable and at home it was necessary that a whole nation should be specially trained for centuries in the qualities required for his proper nurture. It was necessary that this people should have, in the first place, a rare and high degree of the high and rare virtue known as tolerance. Every individual in that nation must value his own independence at such a rate that he stood ready to defend the independence of every other man,

Every member of that society must have learned to allow every other member to go to heaven or hell by the route that liked him best. A respect, or at least a tolerance, best of all an amused affection, for the oddities of human nature, for those qualities in which one man differs from all others, had to be developed in that people. Clearly, these are rigorous conditions, but the hobby-horse would not, and indeed could not, appear until they were fulfilled.

The conditions have been met only once in the whole course of human history. They were not met in the Eastern world, where the individual is drowned in the welter of humanity; nor in the ancient Western world, where the individual was engulfed in the State; nor in the mediæval, where he was swallowed by the Church; nor in the Land of the Free, where he lives, if at all, like a fugitive slave; nor in France, with its talent for social laughter. They were fulfilled triumphantly in England during the first decades of the eighteenth century. Then and there it was that the first full-grown hobby-horses were seen in the world —and a noble breed they were.

They came to England because England was ready for them. She had been trying hard for a long time to make all individuals think and act

and feel alike, but this effort had gone against the grain from the start for the reason that Britons, as they often remind themselves, "never will be slaves," and by the time of Queen Anne people had begun to wonder whether the paltry successes thus far attained had been worth the effort and expense. Comfort, a new leisure, and a sort of peace were spreading through the land a sense of security and well-being, so that for the first time since Elizabethan days Englishmen felt that they might draw long breaths and let themselves go. But since the time of the Virgin Queen Englishmen had put away childish things, and in the eighteenth century they were rather more than mature. All their old toys had lost their lustre. Well, the hobby-horse is the toy of middle and old age.

Historians of culture have often tried to define this change that came over England during the Age of Anne, attributing it in their sober and over-emphatic way now to the triumph of Sentimentalism, now to the Deists, and again to the Peace of the Augustans. A mere essayist may be content to ascribe it largely to England's arrival at middle age, and to the consequent coming of the hobby-horse. Not, however, that so signal an advent occurred unheralded. Throughout the second

half of the preceding century there had been "enthusiasts" in England, and even in France, who busied themselves in such unfruitful activities as landscape gardening, violin playing, and the collection of bric-à-brac or of butterflies. As long before as the first King James there had been antiquaries to be laughed at in Earle's *Microcosmography*. The important consideration is not, however, that these "virtuosos" existed but that they were everywhere regarded with ridicule verging towards hostility, as cumberers of the earth. Society was not yet secure and wealthy enough to afford them, and it had not yet abandoned the humanistic ideal, strongly reinforced by the Renaissance, of "*l'honnête homme qui ne se pique de rien.*" We may learn how necessary the rounded development of human powers is felt to be in every young and dangerful society by observing that every one of Shakespeare's tragic heroes is brought to wreck by some single deficiency or hypertrophy, some "mole of nature" that "doth the whole noble substance dout to his own scandal." Ben Jonson, again, and the scores of "character" writers who followed him, levelled derision at the lop-sided man in whom one interest or idea dominates and threatens to absorb all the others. Those famous "humours" through which the wits of

a whole century drove their shafts of social ridicule were merely hobbies under another name. They were treated so despitefully not because of any national prejudice—for one suspects that England has always yearned toward the hobby-horse—but because they seemed in every sense an extravagance, like poodles in war-time. A deep rift within the nation had to be filled, a Glorious Revolution had to be consummated, the country had to be triumphant not only over herself but on foreign lands and seas, the "virtuosos" had to band together in a Royal Society for the Advancement of Science and to put forth no less a champion of their cause than Sir Isaac Newton, before the hobby-horse could pasture peacefully on English ground.

But when he did at length come into his own, how he enriched and variegated the landscape, making England all at once and for the first time the land we know, the land of Sir Roger de Coverley and of Mr. Pickwick and of Jorrocks. Peace and leisure, somewhat helped out by the third Earl of Shaftesbury but far more abetted by a natural penchant of the people, made England more tolerant of personal idiosyncrasies than any country had ever dared to be before. The despised virtuoso became either a "scientist" or a hobby-rider, as the

case might be, for the two stem really from the same source. Fear of personal peculiarity gave place to a delightful sense of social affluence and security in its presence, as who should say, "You see what we are powerful and wealthy enough to afford." And as a proof of all this the word "virtuoso" was completely rehabilitated and became what it still remains, a term of high approbation.

Such a change could have been brought about only by Englishmen, with their innate liking for the asymmetrical, the anti-social, the odd. It could have happened only in a land where play becomes scholarship and scholarship a stiff-jointed kind of play, a land which has made the richest literature on earth out of a deft inveterate mingling of childishness with maturity. The hobby-horse is ridden by middle-aged gentlemen who cannot quite manage to grow up and by old codgers too stiff for the sports of youth and too lazy to achieve true leisure. For these two hundred years England has been crowded with such old codgers and middle-aged gentlemen. You can see them in droves to-day at Bath, Cheltenham, Leamington Spa, Tunbridge Wells, or in the club windows along Piccadilly—hard riders all. These are the men who have bred the hobby-horse, improving him generation by genera-

tion until he attained his present speed and stature. He is as certainly a product of England as the horse-proper is of Arabia. One may encounter him, to be sure, on every continent and isle of the sea, for even Americans now play bridge and golf or collect Windsor chairs in a vague imitation of the English hobby-rider's manner, but everywhere the discerning eye observes in him the marks of English extraction. Nowhere do you find him so pampered, so fondled, so elaborately groomed, as in the correspondence columns of the *London Times*.

And yet we must admit that the Industrial Age has not been wholly favourable to the hobby-horse. His classic epoch was the middle of the eighteenth century, if for no other reason than that the Reverend Lawrence Sterne then wrote and wrought, spurring his own steed through six or eight inimitable volumes and ever celebrating the hobbies of other men. To everything that he says about hobby-horses I gladly subscribe, excepting only his assertion that they are of ancient lineage. "Have not the wisest men of all ages," says he, "not excepting Solomon himself—have they not had their hobby-horses—their running horses—their coins and their cockle-shells, their drums and their trumpets, their fiddles,

their pallets—their maggots and their butterflies?" I answer, no. They have been too busy, too insecure, too little at ease. It is a hobby of mine own to insist that hobby-horses all and sundry are modern. As the Reverend Sterne himself wisely points out, "there is no disputing about hobby-horses." I do not dispute; I merely assert, holding that if a man is to write about hobby-horses at all he should do it hobby-horsically.

But now that I have cleared my ground by dint of hard thinking, and have worked in the prolegomena of my subject, the time has come to bring this treatise to a close. It would be easy and delightful, if I had the space, to enumerate the several species of the hobby-horse, such as the acquisitive, the erudite, the athletic, and the dabbling. I take it rather to heart that after doing all the really difficult work on this topic I cannot go on to describe the hobby-horses I have met, to dilate upon the collectors of walking-sticks, of ink-wells, of first editions, and of ivory elephants who have cheered my lonely way. And that strangest hobby that any man ever rode—the hobby, I mean, which makes one spend all his days in the collection of metal disks and slips of written or printed paper kept in a bank and called with a flush of pride one's "bank account"—is nothing to

be said about him? Quite readily and willingly I could show that a great part of what we call "pure scholarship" is in reality little more than a great riding-school with very elaborate rules. And I should like to point out why it is that although we love and cherish hobby-riders in times of prosperity, yet when the slightest frost of political or social or economic adversity comes upon us all their steeds are quickly and quietly stabled out of sight. Here is a topic that calls for a full and leisurely treatment in a book. I should like to write that book myself—but it will have to wait until I have completed my researches into the legend of the unicorn.

IN DEFENCE OF THE UNICORN

THERE has just come to my desk a letter from one who has been informed that I should like, some day, to write a Natural History of Hobby-horses but that I have decided to postpone this interesting task until I have completed my present researches into the legend of the Unicorn. The letter is written in a tone of most gracious courtesy and is in all important respects just of the sort that is needed now and then by an obscure scribbler toiling at his desk year after year, with no more emolument or praise than is just enough to keep him scribbling on. I hope, therefore, that I shall not be thought ungrateful in singling out one sentence of this letter for adverse comment. In the midst of his judicious and deserved praise of Hobby-horses, my correspondent exhorts me to "cut the Unicorn"—meaning, I suppose, to cut his acquaintance and to pretermit my studies in his legend—and then proceeds with the remark to which I should like to draw particular attention: "To me, at least, he has never seemed quite respectable."

My answer lies also on the desk before me. I have written: "But what if the disreputable Unicorn happens at the moment to be my own Hobby-horse? Should not one have mastered the practice of this equestrianism before he aspires, or descends, to the bookish theoric? The world has waited long and patiently for a history of Hobby-horses, and can wait for another lustrum, but there are a few people —perhaps half a dozen—who are positively clamorous for a history of Unicorns. These must be first served."

Having finished this answer, which is not nearly so complaisant as I could wish, I sat pondering for a full minute with my pen poised above the signature, so that before the ink was dry upon the paper I was far gone in a reverie upon Hobby-horses and Unicorns, respectability and . . . its opposite. And first I thought how strangely it has come about that this noble beast, once honoured by all mankind for his beauty and power and virtue, has fallen so low in the ways of three hundred years that now there is perhaps only one so poor as to do him reverence. I thought of that rich tapestry in Florence, "all the long labour of some captive queen," which depicts the naming of the animals in Eden, remembering how they file past Adam in pairs—all save one, the Unicorn,

and he moves on before the whole procession serene, resplendent, and alone.

Alone! In that solitude of the Unicorn, by which as much as by his foremost position the maker of the tapestry intended, no doubt, to suggest his precellency, I thought I found the reason for his present low repute. For is it not true, I asked myself, that all things increase in respectability just in proportion as they are numerous, widely familiar, generally accepted? A straw hat in June is eminently respectable, at any rate if it is of the same shape and colour as ten million other straw hats of the season; but a straw hat in January—ah, that is another thing! Almost any flimsy opinion that can win ten million votes is made respectable by mere arithmetic, but the profoundest or most brilliant idea that ever entered a human mind is disreputable so long as it is entertained by its discoverer alone. Now Unicorns, I reminded myself, are rare; they are so excessively rare that some sophisticated people even call them fabulous. What wonder, then, that they have fallen upon evil days! If there were great herds of Unicorns roaming the Western prairies, the members of the packers' associations, at least, would speak and think of them with respect, but the plain fact is that the Unicorn has now been driven far up into the mountain fastnesses

of the poetic imagination. In that high cold region he still roams about and perpetuates his kind, but this does not help him to respectability.

Well, then, let it be admitted that the Unicorn is not respectable, any more than Robinson Crusoe was on his desert isle or Thoreau at Walden Pond. Wolves go in packs, swine root in droves, hippopotami delight to wallow together in the rich, warm river mud, and even Hobby-horses are never quite happy unless there are thirty or forty of them all rocking away in cacophonous unison, but the Unicorn stalks alone. Avoiding as he does all the best society, he cannot expect a high social rating. He is a lonely individualist, a solitarian, dwelling secretly in remote places, Cæsar of his leafy Rome. Ground that has been tainted by a human tread he will not graze upon. He holds aloof even from his own kind so haughtily that two Unicorns have never been seen together—a fact which has led some investigators to question whether the Unicorn is not, like the Phœnix, unique. I myself incline to this view, not so much upon zoological grounds as because I doubt whether this comparatively insignificant planet, so deeply concerned as it is with respectability, is worthy of more than one specimen at a time.

To have this matter of the Unicorn's social

standing settled in my own mind is rather a relief, yet I cannot help wondering, with no thought of appealing against the verdict, whether my correspondent is aware that this animal's horn, on the testimony of Thomas Dekker, was once "worth half a city." Has he heard that Queen Elizabeth's specimen, not a good one, was valued by the German traveller Hentzner at the equivalent of two hundred thousand pounds, and that the horn was sold by the apothecaries of Florence during the fifteenth century for ten times its weight in gold? I mention these considerations, with full consciousness of their essential vulgarity, only because we are so likely to estimate respectability upon a pecuniary standard. My correspondent probably knows that within the horn and at its base there lies a male carbuncle so terribly resplendent that no man has ever looked upon it and lived to tell the tale. No need to tell him the horn's marvellous properties, as, for example, the fact that a scorpion or any other venomous reptile is unable to cross a line which has been drawn with it on the ground. He knows, of course, that the horn was used until the eve of the French Revolution to test for poison all the food served to the kings of France, and also he is aware that when one cuts the horn longitudinally he finds

therein figures of men and women and plants and trees and running streams all curiously carved from end to end, a little world. Although I know that these simple matters have no longer any interest, I cannot help dwelling upon them with a certain fondness and pride, for I possess a Unicorn's horn of my own. It lies on the desk before me as I write these words, a long, straight stick of voluted ivory. There has been a time, and that not long ago, when the proudest king in Europe would have given the jewelled crown off his head to possess it.

There is this strange thing about Unicorns: no really credible authority has ever definitely claimed to have seen one. As for the two or three travellers who assert that they have done so—like Cosmas Indicoploustes, for example, who gives a circumstantial description of two which he says he encountered in the royal gardens at Mecca, a present from the king of Abyssinia—it is perfectly evident on other grounds that they are idle fabricators, not to use a stronger term. Men have always been quite sure where the Unicorn was to be found, but, for one reason or another, they have not found him. His horn, as I have indicated, has long been an article of commerce, but the beast himself has eluded us.

I say that men have always been quite sure that they knew where to find Unicorns, and the exaggeration is pardonable because the animal's fame is exceedingly ancient. He was reported to the Western world six or seven centuries before Christ by a physician to the court of Persia, but by that time he was already an old story in China. As the terrible one-horned Sz he is pictured and described in the *'Rh Yah*, and as the Lin he appears in the *Shu King*, twelve feet high, in five colours, and "with a call which in the middle part is like a monastery bell." Aristotle and Pliny knew him thoroughly even in minute anatomical details, and what they knew, with certain additions, became the common property of the Middle Ages. The correct method of capturing Unicorns was described as long ago as the seventh century by Isidore of Seville. One seated a virgin beneath a tree and drove the beast towards her with hound and horn. As soon as he caught sight of the maiden his wildness left him and he ran to lay his head in her lap, after which the hunters had easy work. And yet, although this device of venery was well understood, and was depicted times without number, indeed, in stained glass and tapestry and carved wood, no actual capture is on record. More than that, it would appear that no single Unicorn has ever

been seen. Perhaps we may learn as much about human nature as we can about Unicorns from the fact that the hope, even the expectation, of seeing one has never in all these three thousand years quite died out. He has been sought among the snows of Thibet, through "antres vast and deserts idle," in Cathay and Kamschatka and where the brows of Caucasus reflect the morning. We are seeking him even to-day, for hardly a year passes in which some traveller does not write home that he is on the trail of Unicorns and expects to bag one soon. Now is it not a strange thing in human nature that we should so tirelessly pursue and seek and be unable to do without the dreams, the fleeting beauty, which we no longer respect and hardly any longer believe in? But so it is. There are many examples. The highest beauty and the deepest wisdom are not quite respectable, and perhaps they never have been; no single example has ever been seen, yet we cannot give up the quest.

Should we be any better off, I wonder, if substantial incarnations of these ideals were more commonly to be met with in the ways of the world? I imagine my correspondent as threading the paths of some intricate wood, let us say on the Lost Atlantis or among the bosky denes of Xanadu—and suddenly, breast-

ing the fern, mighty and beautiful, a milk-white beast rises tremendous upon the sight, his refulgent horn tapering up two fathoms high among the boughs and glimmering there like silver in the moonshine. O then, it seems to me, all considerations of respectability might drop away, and he who had been blessed with such a vision would think better of his eyes for ever. Yes; but in such a substitution of even a glorious reality for all the lure and distance of an ancient dream, would there not be serious loss? Now that all the seas are charted and the last dragon is slain we need the Unicorn far more than he was needed in the Middle Ages, so opulent as they were in marvels. I hope that he will elude us to the end. Merely the thought of him as still thundering up and down through unimagined forests on the outskirts of geography is worth to us all the mighty sums that popes and emperors once paid down for the jewel of his brow.

And now I hope I have made clear why I cannot accept my correspondent's advice and "cut the Unicorn" in favour of Hobby-horses. Yet there is this further thing to be observed about respectability before I have done, that it is always quite able to take care of itself. Ten thousand pens are scratching day and night in its service, perhaps because it pays so

well, and I think it needs no help of mine. Now Hobby-horses, look you, are eminently respectable; they are kept by comfortable and well-fed leisurely men who look upon all scribblers with contempt; they are groomed and curried and fed with sugar-plums by pampered servants; but hardly anyone cares for the Unicorn nowadays. He who was once studied and debated by the learnedest heads of Europe (see Thomas Bartholinus *De Unicornu* if you doubt the fact), he who lured the boats of Danish fishermen along the coasts of Iceland and Greenland centuries ago, he who has embarrassed the exchequers of princes, he who has been hunted for three thousand years with virgins for bait—but hunted, I am glad to say, in vain—is now swiftly fading into a myth. The very belief that there is or has ever been such a creature is now regarded by many people as a mark of childish credulity. The Unicorn is not respectable. I shall continue my researches.

THE WEALTH OF CHILDHOOD

We have all heard and failed to answer the puzzling question, What becomes of all the pins? For my own part, I do not much care. I ask myself the more serious and farther-reaching question, to which again there is no answer, What becomes of all the toys? This query is more important and has more human pathos because, while no one ever grows very fond of pins, toys were our first friends and companions, they were once our total wealth, they were our world. We lived in and for them, and they seemed to live for us in those magical years when fancy dramatized all existence, making a wonder of the most dismal rag doll or the crudest wooden horse and wagon. In those days we had the savage's happy faculty of creating an object of worship out of almost any chance stick or stone, with this additional advantage for most of us, that there were no atheistical missionaries hanging about to tell us that the exercise of that faculty was wicked. Our toys were almost idols. There was a glamour upon them such as we do not find in the more splendid possessions of our later years, as though a special light fell on them through

some window of our hearts that is now blocked up for ever. We loved them, it seems likely, not for any intrinsic beauty or charm of their own, for often they had none, but rather for a supernal loveliness of which they vaguely reminded our fresh and newcome eyes. But however that may be, we loved them with a devotion such as we shall never feel again for any of the things this various world contains, be they ever so splendid or costly.

Sometimes I think that the very rich man who spends his millions for books or pictures is only striving to revive the joy he once had in some single tattered volume or some blurred and grubby woodcut purchased in his boyhood for a few pennies. But that early delight of his will never be so enticed to return, for it bore no relation whatever to quality, quantity, rarity, expense, or display; it was connected in only the remotest way with the almost universal pleasure in acquisition and private ownership. We seldom said about the toys of our childhood, "These things are ours," but we always felt, "These things are wonderful." And also—do you not remember?—it was always a little strange to us that they should be content with our companionship and willing to pour their lustre upon our days. In our best moments, at any rate, they did not make us

proud but humble, and it seems to me, therefore, that the rich man goes the wrong way to work. If he really wishes to revive that golden time, let him not ransack Europe for Italian Primitives and first editions; rather let him set a hundred men to hunting, searching, sifting in the dust-bins of half a century for the chipped and battered peg-top he played with when a boy, and let him proclaim a splendid prize for the man who brings it back. And then—but it will never be found.

What becomes of all the toys? This is one of the minor mysteries to set beside Sir Thomas Browne's poser, what song the Sirens sang to Ulysses. No doubt it is well that when the proper time arrives we should "put away childish things," but why should we put them quite so far away, and with so violent a gesture of rejection that we can never afterwards win them back? Perhaps it is because youth cannot foresee the time when maturity will long to recapitulate the stages of its pilgrimage, and partly it is because the worth of toys is seldom intrinsic. To all excepting those who have loved them they are essentially worthless when once they have served their turn, and so, once tossed out upon the stream of time, they become mere trivial flotsam and go very swiftly away into oblivion.

These may be excellent reasons for the evanescence of toys, but they do not really lessen my wonder or my protest. I come back with undiminished surprise to the two bare facts that we once loved these bits of rag and terra-cotta and painted wood and coloured stone most passionately, and that now they are gone—gone utterly and for ever, like the clouds of last year's sky, taking with them some part of what was once ourselves. Thinking of this, no one can fail to observe that each of us dies many times before he is laid in the grave. A bundle of old letters, yellowing with age, which we come upon in some forgotten drawer, gives us, now and then, the same saddening realization. Who was this Lilian, this Maude, this Harold and Bertram, who wrote to us so ardently? We cannot recall their faces; for us, at least, they are numbered with the dead, and so is the youth, equally dim to us behind the veil of the years, to whom their letters were addressed. But the toys of childhood are farther still away—so far, indeed, that we often forget how dear they were.

To make clear my own thought and feeling about the relative worth of this lost treasure I have imagined all the wealth of the world as brought together in two great heaps. In one of these piles I have placed all the toys of the past

and present—all the dolls and the tin horns and hobby-horses and toy wagons, the sets of diminutive dishes and the dolls' houses of cardboard, the marbles, the tops, the drums, the tiny yachts and locomotives, the woolly bears and dogs with button eyes, together with all the other innumerable things that have made the happiness of children in all times and lands. In the other pile I think together the total wealth of the adult world—its palaces and towers, its books and pictures, the jewels we have torn from the earth or dredged from the sea, the gold we have toiled and fought and died for, all the possessions that grown men and women have given their hearts to. Having completed this task of fancy, I consider the two heaps of treasure as impartially as I can, and I say with perfect confidence that the second is less than the first when tested by the sum of human happiness of which it has been the centre and in some sense the cause. . . . What other final test is there for the worth of any thing?

Of course, it is hard to speak of these matters without sentimental exaggeration, for in all our thought about childhood we have to allow for the illusion and the pathos of distance, but at least I try to speak soberly and within the truth. I do not think that I exaggerate at all,

or, if I do, not more than enough to compensate for the ecstasies we have forgotten and can never again revive. Let it be remembered, in fairness, that both of my imaginary piles of treasure, the second as surely as the first, are made up of toys, of nothing whatever but the frail playthings wherewith we cheer our lonely hearts for a little while before we must lay them aside for ever. In this view, of course, the millionaire's steam launch is quite as pathetic as the rude boat whittled out by a lad's jack-knife, and his palace on Fifth Avenue is no less a creature of illusion than the baby girl's house of cardboard. We shall soon forget these later and more splendid toys also, as we have forgotten those that went before, and they will float just as swiftly down the river of time. But the playthings that are already gone were more dearly loved than these, with a deeper and more absorbing devotion, and that is why I think that our chief human wealth lies in this imaginary junk-heap of mine which contains all the "derelict trinkets of the darling young."

Yet not quite all the toys of the past have perished; now and then they have long outlived the hearts that loved them. I saw once, in a museum, the mummy of a little Egyptian girl upon whose shrivelled bosom rested the doll she had cherished in life. She herself was

now only a slight bundle of dust and ashes, but her doll of painted clay was still as fresh as on that evening three thousand years ago when she last laid it down to sleep in the cradle beside her bed. The tenderness and the understanding of those who had given her this companion for the dark voyage across eternity and to whisper counsel in the dreadful halls of Osiris awakened thoughts that were quite literally too deep for tears. And I have seen also, at Emerson's home in Concord, the rocking-horse ridden by the boy Waldo, who died in childhood and who was mourned in the most passionate elegy in our language. It stands, or stood, resplendent in vivid paint and voluminous mane, near the door of the study in which *Self-Reliance* was written, as though in silent mockery of all that essay's proud truculence, and for many years it must have reminded the master of the silent house that no human heart, whether of man or boy, can rely upon itself alone.

Although a few of these childish treasures are saved by chance or piety, those of my own early days are all with "the snows of yesteryear." There were among them, for example, three beautiful cornelian marbles, brown-and-red clouded with creamy white. I recall that I used to keep them most of the time buried in

lard, because of a boyish superstition that this would somehow improve their lustre. I never played in games with them, although one was a remarkable "shooter," lest they should disappear in the grass or between the cracks of a wooden side-walk. Hour after hour I sat and polished them with chamois skin, or held them up to the sunlight to admire their dull translucency. It seemed to me a gross defect in my father's large dictionary that it did not list the cornelian under "gems" or "precious stones." For a year or more they were all my pride and joy, but now—well, if you ever come across the marvellous junk-heap I have mentioned, that huge and ever-growing pile of dreams and magic and mystery, you may find my three cornelians there.

And there, too, should be the beloved bicycle which I acquired at the age of nine. Bear with me while I detail its charms. It had "cushion tyres"—intermediate between the "hard" and the "pneumatic" varieties—and it was painted a beautiful blue, with red markings. It had no brakes whatever, but this, to a lad of nine, was almost an advantage. The gear was so low that my feet, when I was going at a good speed, must have made something like two hundred revolutions to the minute. The machine weighed nearly half as much as

its small rider, and it was, so far as I can now recall, totally devoid of springs. In short, it was a bicycle of ultimate and utter perfection, worth all the limousines and aeroplanes that could be parked in ten square miles of open ground. Probably I should not care to give it house-room to-day, and I doubt whether my son would care to be seen riding it, and yet I should like to see it just once more as it was in the days of its glory.

Where is that junk-heap?

DOLLS AND DOLLDOM

The latest news from Russia is that all dolls are to be exiled permanently from the Soviet Republic. Such is the remorseless logic of these people. They began by prohibiting vodka and banishing God; they went on to industrialize the rather absurd and quite useless passion of love; now they are driving out the saints and idols of childhood. Thorough, one calls that, and expeditious. We may expect them to attend promptly to any other lingering abuses that might make life still worth living, so that Holy Russia, having dropped all her nonsense, will soon be completely stripped for action, like the rest of us.

The amount of time that has been lavished hitherto by the children of Russia upon dolls—time that might have been devoted to the multiplication-table and to memorizing the communistic creed—is saddening to contemplate. In this time-consuming and unproductive occupation, moreover, they acquired notions and feelings of personal fidelity which are not merely useless but positively dangerous in a State which demands devotion to itself alone. And then, worst of all, the little Russian

communists had the incorrigible habit of dressing their dolls to represent kings and queens, grand-dukes, and the like, which simply could not be tolerated. Dolls had to go.

So much for official edict. Otherwise, one fancies, things remain in Russian dolldom pretty much as they were. For, of course, the dolls have not gone, and they have no intention of going . . . any more than God, or love, or even vodka. If it comes to a contest in banishing, indeed, a sensible person will lay his wager on the dolls, seeing that they have on their side all the children and all the adults who can remember childhood. Consider in the first place that dolls are something like ten thousand years older than communism, and that they may therefore be thought to answer to a deeper human need. Consider the intense conservatism of childhood. Consider, finally, that there must still be a good deal of human nature in Russia—a basic fact which we too often ignore and which should lead us to read much of the "news" from that quarter with caution and to suspect that it has been more or less damaged in transit. We may conclude that the dolls of Russia are perfectly safe.

The dolls of the whole civilized world are more than safe; they are more numerous, more delicately and lovingly made than ever

before. After a long period in which they were debased by greed and ignorance, they are now more and more commonly things of beauty made by artists with affectionate skill. Grown women throughout Europe and America have been purchasing dolls in recent years by the thousand, not for their children only but for themselves. Our social critics are telling us, of course, that these women have no children, and that they buy dolls to take the place of them. They say also that this whole fashion, if it is no more than that, is merely another sign of our pervading childishness. An awkward objection to this view is the easily observed fact that only a small proportion of the dolls purchased by adult women represent babies, or even very young children; and indeed it is one of the fundamental errors we constantly make about dolls to suppose that they answer exclusively or even primarily to the maternal instinct. Even Anatole France seems to fall into this error in the very passage in which he justly complains that philosophers have paid far too little attention to dolls. No objection is to be made to his assertion that the doll is more than the statue, more than the idol, and that it is *une chose auguste*, but when he says that "it finds its way to the heart of a woman long before she is a woman" one suspects a tinge of

French feminolatry. For does it not equally find its way to the heart of a man long before he is a man? Why ignore the fact that quite normal boys also play with dolls, and no doubt would do so even more if the practice were not foolishly laughed at by their elders as effeminate? Their dolls may be leaden soldiers, woolly dogs, kings, or slaves, almost anything but waxen-haired infants in baby clothes, but they are dolls nevertheless. Shall we call this the nascent paternal instinct? By no means. In girls and boys alike, and in more of their elders, perhaps, than we suspect, the affection for dolls is chiefly an aspect of the social sense and an example of the pleasure we all take in projecting our own personalities and in controlling the lives of others.

How have we allowed ourselves to continue so long in this egregious blunder about dolls, thinking of them as "babies" and as chiefly useful in training little girls in the instincts of motherhood? Why has no one yet written an adequate philosophy and history of dolls? They are the oldest of our contemporaries; their lineage reduces to insignificance the proudest aristocracy; they are the true cosmopolites, for never an age or a country has been without them. And yet, excepting a few shallow and condescending remarks scattered here and

there in books on other themes, they have been ignored by historians and philosophers alike. They would provide an inexhaustible topic for a learned pen that had not lost its grace in gaining erudition. They would make a book replete with lore out of the dusty past yet apposite to the present, glancing with humour and warm with human nature. Scholars are an unaccountable lot.

The materials for a study of dolls lie ready to hand, for we can trace these little people with ease and certainty for at least four thousand years. Unlike the grown men and women of the past with which our histories are exclusively concerned, many dolls of the ancient world are still with us to be touched and gazed at. We know more about the appearance of the dolls the Pharaohs played with when they were children than we do about the appearance of the Pharaohs themselves. More than all this, there is an unbroken continuity in the tradition of dolls which would be difficult to match elsewhere, and we can study the earliest phases of the doll problem in any nursery of our own time. Nothing ever changes in the country of dolls, which is not bounded by time or space. Wide as the world and ancient as everlasting childhood, that country is untouched by our hastening centuries and

millenniums. Ancient as it is, in a sense, it has no past.

However serious we may be in our thought about dolls, and however free from condescension, it is doubtful whether any adult person can hope to do more than look back toward that country, grateful for every waft of memory that blows across the years. We remember that we lived there once for a few swift months that seemed for ever, and perhaps a few of us recall the faces of the friends we knew there long ago. Although we can no longer understand the devotion with which those friends inspired us, that is no reason for doubting that it was genuine and deep. We come across, in a museum, the clumsy image in terra-cotta which some little Egyptian girl carried with her to the grave forty centuries ago, or we overhear the whispered confidence of a modern child as she hushes her doll to sleep for the night, and we take a few steps backward toward the changeless country of the people who never grow up.

One of the most engaging things about dolls is their everlasting youth. They smile at the centuries as though they had been dipped one and all in that mysterious fountain which Ponce de Léon could never find. By hundreds and thousands they have come down to us

from ancient Rome, from Athens, from Heliopolis and Ur of the Chaldees, and yet they are always the exact contemporaries of the children who first held them in their arms. There lies in a London museum a doll of stone made by a savage who was a master in the prehistoric art of flint-knapping. For thousands of years it has been lying under the sod of some huge down, and yet if you should take it from the case and hand it to the five-year-old girl by your side she would know at once what to do with it, as though it had been made for her alone. It would be just her age.

Another charming trait in dolls is their cosmopolitanism. Although they often show signs of nationality in garb and feature, they are all really brothers and sisters under the skin, the world round. This being so, it would seem that a great convention of dolls, brought together from all corners of the earth, might do something more than we have been able to do towards advancing the amity of nations. Grown men and women, we are well aware, regard most things from an amazing number of different angles, according as they have been brought up on this or that portion of the earth's surface, and they arrive at remarkably contrasting beliefs according as they speak this or that language. Dolls are not that way,

or children either; they are much alike wherever you find them—which is another way of saying that they have common sense. And so one might hope for great things from a convention of dolls, especially if all the statesmen of the world could be brought together to see it. In such company would they not understand, at last, what things are really important and what are negligible? If not, then we might well despair of them entirely.

Something in the nature of this suggested congress has already been convened. In return for thirteen thousand dolls sent to Japan as "messengers of friendship," there have recently arrived on American soil sixty "Doll Ambassadors," one from each prefecture of the Japanese Empire. Travelling in true Oriental splendour from city to city under the guidance of a special Japanese envoy, this legation has at last taken up permanent headquarters at Washington—from whence, however, it will soon set out on the first of many tours of the country. Many an imposing embassy has crossed the Pacific to less purpose, for dolls are about the best example we have of that "touch of nature" which makes the whole world kin.

If there is any distinction to be made in the world-wide race of dolls it is that between what may be called the idealistic and the realistic

kinds, but the first of these is so superior that one would like to confine the name "doll" to it alone. We cannot positively assert that eyes that open and shut, real hair, movable limbs, and the faculty of articulate speech are likely to stand in the way of a child's affection, for we know that a child can love anything, but we may say at least that these gauds and flourishes do not help much; they are more dear to donors than to small recipients and constitute not so much an aristocracy in dolldom as a plutocracy. The idealistic doll may be made of iron, wood, bronze, clay, stone, or any other material that will hold together, and it need show only the rudest approximation to the human form. Children have been known to lavish affection upon mere wisps of hay tied together in the middle and upon pieces of broom-handle with unravelled rope nailed to them for hair. One might almost hazard a guess that the more a given doll leaves to be desired in the way of physical charm, the more it is likely to be loved, for thus it gives more scope for chivalry and imagination. The essential thing is that it shall be enthroned in the heart.

Realistic dolls, unable to pretend to any such glory, go in for "looking like real people," an ambition of a distinctly lower sort. There

have always been a great many of these, from the time when they were manufactured by the shipload in ancient Sardis and were perfected at Tanagra in Minoan Crete until they were sold to the crowned heads of Europe in the eighteenth century by M. Juhel, of Paris. There is serious question, however, whether these are really dolls at all, and whether we should not rather call them images or figurines or puppets. They hold their heads very high, but at their terra-cotta hearts they ought to know that they are of a distinctly lower order than the dolls of rag and battered wood and chipped clay, the armless and legless dolls, the dolls without noses or hair, the dolls that can neither dance nor speak, the dolls that children have loved.

THE PURSUIT OF LEARNING

It has to be remembered early and late that Dido is at present only seven weeks of age. The curiosity, impertinence, and forgetfulness which I find so engaging in her would be intolerable in a cat of mature months, but when I consider how little time she has had for learning anything I am filled with admiration of her accomplishments. She uses all the time all the little information she does possess and she is busy night and day in acquiring more. Whatever faults and irresponsibilities, incident to her nonage, may yet be seen in her will disappear quite soon enough, for no error is more steadily and surely corrected by kittens than that of extreme youth. Give them only a little time and they try our patience in that way no longer.

Young as she is, Dido has already travelled deep into a world beyond my imagining—a world of odours I shall never know, a country of rustlings and furtive undulations and stealing shadows. While I sit here all day long, she walks abroad in that strange land, wandering farther and farther on with each new day, and the

things she sees there are as unknown to me as the thoughts I gather from black marks on white paper will always be to her. Where I see an arm-chair in a dark corner of the room she discovers a cavern filled with friendly shadows in which she may lurk unseen, observing the outside world through half-closed eyes; it is a solitude to which she may retire for meditation upon her infant past and mysterious future, a retreat from human interference, and an ambush also from which she can pounce upon a passing trouser-leg with startling effect. Thus she puts the simplest piece of furniture to rich and unaccustomed uses. The book-shelves towering all about her eight feet high are so many beetling crags from her elevation, rugged alps too steep for mountaineering. In these, however, she is not much interested, for the smell of the lowest shelf has probably told her that they are not good to eat. To a man of my tastes it is instructive to see how indifferent a well-bred kitten brought up in a library can be to a book. Paper and ink interest Dido only when tied to the end of a string and drawn across the floor, and even then she is capable of only a momentary concentration. At present she has only this single trait in common with the literary clan, that when I take her out of doors, where she has

seldom been, she is terrified and flees to the nearest shadow.

Yet Dido is unquestionably studious. A moment ago she scrambled eagerly up to the window-seat in order to pursue some researches upon the Boston fern which had apparently been postponed until the last possible moment. The fern reminded her, no doubt, of her ancestral jungles, and it tickled her nose delightfully, but before she had time to savour this new sensation a fly buzzed against the pane, and at this she made two or three delicate passes with a forepaw. Then a moving leaf-shadow caught her attention and the fly escaped. While investigating the properties of leaf-shadows she suddenly caught sight of her own tail, an object of overwhelming interest in which she may be said to have "specialized," and she was seized by a determination, unweakened by former defeats, to overtake it this time without fail. I could see that determination surge up in her, and she eyed her tail for half a second with just the concentrated energy in which the man of science focuses upon a new investigation. Then a crouch, a spring, and round and round she went in four or five dizzy circles—the tail somehow managing to maintain its original handicap—until one paw went over the edge of the window-

seat and she slipped, scratched, toppled, and fell sprawling to the floor.

This conclusion to so earnest an effort was, of course, somewhat ignominious and even laughable, suggesting to me many a human and at least one mythic parallel; but Dido, in appearance at any rate, was neither humbled nor downcast. Without manifesting the slightest surprise at the sudden conclusion of her studies, she gathered her tiny limbs together and sat down in the exact spot where she had fallen, curling the still mysterious tail about her haunches and settling herself to think things out. The most consummate lady in the land could not have managed better under the difficult circumstances. As she sits there now in the sunshine, eight inches of perfect gravity, such trifles as ferns and flies and leaf-shadows and elusive tails are obviously nothing to her. Perfectly motionless, her head slightly tilted in her most becoming attitude, she "forgets herself to marble." It is in this mood of abstraction and majesty that she shows most clearly her descent from the Sphinx of Egypt. I should be unkind to laugh at such perfection of baby dignity, and ungenerous to test the depth and continuity of her mood by tossing her the irresistible ping-pong ball, for I know already that her weakness as well as her charm lies in a

certain inconsequence, or call it versatility, of mood. She can be nothing long.

Although I respect Dido's self-reliance, I find her more engaging when she takes some notice of my presence, as when she comes to my chair and rubs her arched back against my ankle, or raises her flower-like face and calls up to me in that infant treble that sounds so like the E-string of a muted violin. All this manœuvre is to imply that she prefers my lap, for the time being, to her cushion in the sun. I suspect some feminine flattery, although she ought to be aware that I will do all I can for her without these blandishments, but I always succumb. During the first few minutes of her stay with me I turn the pages of my book very softly, but her agate eyes half open at every motion I make until she falls asleep. I do not know, of course, how she may feel about it, but to me these are the best times we have together. There is a pleasure not quite definable in holding this swift and eager creature, so new to the world and so delighted with it all, stilled to a ball of grey fluff which I can almost cover with my hand. What I may call her personality is submerged for the time and she becomes a tiny symbol of life's mystery and of the pathos of all youth.

But such hours as these are exceptional. For

the most part Dido and I, although we inhabit the same rooms, live far apart—she in a world of odours and furtive whispers, as I have said, and I among black marks on white paper. She sleeps a good part of the time that I am awake, and she is most awake while I am sleeping. Very late at night I close the door of her chamber and leave her to her own devices—and what they are who shall say, or guess? Once I looked in at her during the small hours and saw her weaving back and forth in the moonshine like a happy wraith, as though dancing to some soundless music. Not only at night but in the daytime as well she seems to be listening to sounds that I never hear, and she draws her happiness from sources mysterious to me but quite evidently sufficient.

Already I am looking forward, though with no haste, to the time when Dido will sit by the library fire of an evening in mature amplitude, a savant and a sage long before her master. Her studies will go forward much more rapidly than mine because she will soon give up her restless prying into things in general and will concentrate soberly upon the few things that really matter—and partly, too, because she is already content with the outer smells of books while I am always threading the endless wildernesses within them. After her pupil days

are done she will have a wide margin of time left to her for the meditation which alone can ripen knowledge into wisdom, whereas I shall always be learning and always postponing the question as to what my present knowledge means.

It is clear, then, that the relations between Dido and her master will soon be reversed. Before many moons have waned she will be regarding my distracted and Banderlog haste in the pursuit of learning with the same covert amusement and, I hope, the same indulgence that I have had this morning, but she will see it with eyes that have looked quite through the shows of this world and found nothing better at last than quietness and peace of heart. She will see me make a rush at the higher mathematics, forget all about them in two days because of a sudden interest in the varnish of old violins, unfold my wings like Icarus toward astronomy and come crashing down, as she and Icarus did, to the scribbling of an essay upon—who knows what? But when that time of her ripened wisdom and my own continued folly comes I hope she will smile, if at all, with the forbearance due from one old companion to another, remembering the frolics of her own young days and imagining, perhaps, the happiness of being always a youth in a world of books.

LENDING ENCHANTMENT TO THE VIEW

Two miles down the hill from where I sit at my study window the towers of Oxford glow and pale in the September afternoon. No words that I can find suggest their ripened beauty, or even name the changing tints that bathe them as the clouds come and go before the sun. Diaphanous, filmy in the distance, yet distinct also in each delicate dome and turret, they rise like an exhalation there at the foot of Shotover Hill, all tinctured and washed in lights of lilac and rose.

After years of acquaintance with "that sweet city with her dreaming spires," I find myself looking down at this picture in a mood almost of incredulity, hardly believing that anything so ethereal can be set beside an earthly stream or cut in stubborn stone. Would not a storm-wind from the north tear the whole vision to tatters? Is this a fabulous city that a poet has imagined, rising rather "in the Monarch Thought's dominions" than beside the lapsing Isis? Oxford seems to me this afternoon, and at this distance, scarcely more

than a perfect myth lying outside of space and time, and I am almost prepared to believe that when her legend fades she, too, will disappear and leave not a wrack behind.

But between me and those basking towers, so near that my window almost overhangs it, there lies a farmyard of the most indubitable and substantial actuality, equipped with all the animal and vegetable appurtenances thereto. This provides the foreground to my picture, so that I look out at "the last lingering enchantments of the Middle Ages" over a medley of swine and strutting fowls. The juxtaposition seems, at first, incongruous, and one of my friends, while admiring my view of the University towers, has clearly shown that the total effect is marred for him by the necessity of looking across a foreground which is, to his taste, a little sordid. The correct answer to him would be that I do not always look across this foreground but spend a good deal of time looking into it, this being the best way I know of dealing with an environment which is not immediately pleasing. By this process I have come to feel that the composition of the picture framed by my window is exactly right. I have even come to see in it a hint of symbolic significance.

A little faith, some insight, and perhaps a

good deal of patient expectation and hope, are all that we ever need in order to pierce the apparently sordid crust of things and to come at the beauty that lies always within them. Where have we ever found actual and invincible dullness except in ourselves, and what has ever seemed to us hopelessly sordid unless we were so? Romanticists though we all are, we should do what we can to combat the profound pessimism expressed in Campbell's line: "'Tis distance lends enchantment to the view." If this means, as it seems to mean, that the world will not stand close examination and that the actual is always and necessarily disappointing, then it is a remark as shallow as the man who first made it and is quite undeserving of its fame. That there are millions of dreary and restless souls for whom the line tells the exact truth of course we know, but we know also that these people are insufficiently equipped for passing final judgments upon the world. All that distance can do to glorify far-off things may be done by a little faith and insight applied to things underneath one's window, even though that window looks upon a farmyard. After several months of observation I am prepared to say that a farmyard, judiciously considered, is anything but a dull place, and that this one before which I sit is quite worthy

of its position in the foreground of a picture backed by Oxford's towers.

Everyone ought to know that wherever there is even one free-running and energetic pig, dullness is definitely banished from that place. Well, there are many pigs in the farmyard below my window—approximately one hundred of them. There are pigs majestic and minute, pigs agile and pigs deliberate, greedy pigs and pigs (if you will believe it) ascetic, pigs half-hidden in soil of their own delving, and other pigs trotting off with a tremendous flapping of ears on some pressing expedition through the tall grass, pigs rampant, pigs meditative, recumbent and slumbering pigs—Oh, a world of pigs! And all of them—this is the noticeable and most satisfactory thing about them—so abounding and rejoicing and, as it were, glorying in piggishness. I am ready to admit that a pig in a sty is often a somewhat melancholy, perhaps even a sordid, object, for there, in durance vile, he is likely to brood, to neglect his toilet and, in general, to "wallow in all manner of swinish conversation." But this deplorable condition tells us more about the man who put him there than it does about the essential pig himself. A pig unpampered and unpenned, "seeking the food he eats and pleased with what he gets," is a totally different

sort of creature. He is nimble, adventurous, intelligent, clean, and takes a cheerful view of things. Without asserting that he is quite so philosophic as a cow, I do maintain that he is more intellectual.

This farm, of which I am at present, in the literal though unusual sense, the overseer, is conducted upon the sound principle of self-help, all the beasts and fowls being left to forage largely for themselves. Perhaps this is the reason why the pigs all show such amazing independence of character—why they are so much more audacious, adventurous, and bellicose withal, than the pigs of my earlier acquaintance. Their earnestness, their sincerity of purpose, their whole-hearted devotion to whatever business they may be bent upon for the moment, is beyond praise. "Root, hog, or die" appears to be a bracing injunction, for it certainly makes good pigs, whatever may be said of the bacon.

There is always dignity and charm in any creature, however lowly, that observes the decorum of its kind, and the pleasure we take in such perfect specimens is expressed, for example, in the phrase "a manly man." Our world of counterfeits and approximations, in which even the real thing so seldom looks the part, does not give us this pleasure so often

that we can afford to neglect it even when it comes in the humblest guise. I feel a certain gratitude, therefore, to these vociferous animals that delve and fight and scramble all over the foreground of my picture, for each of them approaches in his way the Platonic idea of a pig. To see them feint and dodge in single combat, like expert boxers, each guarding his own ears while snatching fiercely at the ears of his adversary; to see them tug and strain in a circle when each of the combatants has finally secured an ear and is struggling to make off with it into the recesses of the landscape; to see them suddenly abandon hostilities and return to "business as usual," as though nothing had happened—all this is to form new notions of porcine tenacity and wit. How majestically they strut among the fowls, nosing ducks and chickens aside as a first-rate man-of-war might so many pinnaces! With what intensity of conviction they lift up their voices in the dead of night beneath my chamber window, a few of the smaller ones having grown dissatisfied, perhaps, with their sleeping accommodations at the bottom of the ten-deep pile, and all of them protesting in chorus to the serious stars that a wrong has been done which must be righted! A farmyard dull? Not with one hundred pigs.

If there is anything more conducive to gales of laughter than a field full of pigs, it must be a pond full of ducks, and this, too, I have, over yonder beside the willows. On the pond, as in the field, there goes forward all day long an earnest and absorbing pursuit of business. (Yes, it is certainly one reason for the pleasure we take in watching animals that they are always deeply engaged in work or play, never bored, never tired of simply being themselves.) Looking out of window at any hour between dawn and dusk I can see twenty ducks careering up and down the water in exact formations, like small battleships on parade, and twenty more ducks will be standing on their heads at the same time in the water, their paddles working vigorously to maintain their balance. Whenever one member of the group secures a particularly delectable morsel from the bottom, all the others make after him like speed-launches under high pressure, instantly transforming the quiet pond into a hubbub of feathers and froth. Considered as humorists, ducks enjoy certain advantages over pigs, for they have two elements to perform upon, and the noise they make is in itself, to any right-thinking person, a direct incitement to laughter. Probably they are at their very best when they leave the water, preen

their feathers, and strut up and down on the bank, endeavouring to look military; but at all times I give thanks for ducks.

Geese also there are somewhere about the farm, but they are mostly voices to me—and what magniloquent voices!—because they seldom gather at the pond. I wish they would come more frequently, for there is something philosophic in the aspect of a meditative goose that is outside the range of ducks. A heavy-gaited horse sometimes stumbles down to the pond at twilight for a drink, when the day's work is over, and stands there very quietly in the shadows, making pearly circles in the water with his lowered muzzle. All the cows are kept in the pasture over the slope of the hill, so that I have to do without the touch of timeless leisure they might add to the landscape. Several hundreds of white leghorns, active and loquacious, dot the middle distance. Innumerable swallows and martins draw swift lines of beauty against the sky.

These are the dramatis personæ in the scenes that are played beneath my window, and each of them acts with perfect decorum in the part he has been assigned. Now and then the protagonist comes among them, the farmer himself, like a monarch making a progress through his domain. There is authority in his mere

glance, and all that he does has the simple beauty of things enduring and necessary. Celts, Romans, Saxons, Danes, and Normans have conquered and overrun these fields without altering his sober routine or disturbing the slow rhythms of his toil. Whatever kings might rule in Caerleon or Winchester or London, he has always had to sow and plough and harvest the corn with the stir and hum of the farmyard always about him. In comparison with his work and all the ages of come and gone that it represents, the filmy towers and domes of Oxford are indeed scarcely more than an exhalation, the iridescence of a momentary bubble.

Or, if that is too gloomy a view, this farmyard and what it stands for, at any rate, is the foundation of Oxford. Her towers rise just over the field on the hill-top, which they have planted this year to corn, and in this accidental perspective I find a symbol. Oxford and her magical beauty, her learning, her power that has gone out into all the world, could never have existed without the support of such patient creatures as these before me. In every sense they are worthy to fill the foreground of a picture that is crowned by the Oxford towers.

"APPARENTLY nothing would please him more than a swift decline of modern civilization and a return to pastoral simplicity."

What could there be in those simple words to bring me suddenly upright in my chair and to startle me broad awake? Nothing profound or brilliant, certainly, in the way of criticism; nothing remarkably witty or wise. The sentence was roughly applicable to a great many persons of our time, characterizing a class rather than an individual. Quite negligible words they would probably have seemed to any other reader, but to me they were startling, almost incredible. The reason was that they referred to me.

I have kept a clear recollection of the thoughts and feelings that were aroused, during the first few minutes, by the sentence I have quoted, for those thoughts and feelings were unusually vivid. It seems to me that the experience was typical, and that something like it must happen to thousands of people in every year of our journalistic era in which, far more emphatically than in the times of the Apostle, no man liveth unto himself alone. For this

reason, and also because the incident had a certain intrinsic interest, I ignore whatever hint of egoism there may be in telling the story.

Here, then, was some person whom I had never seen, of whom I had never heard before, whose very name I have since forgotten, taking it upon himself to classify my inmost thoughts, to placard and pigeon-hole me before the world, or such small part of the world as his words might reach, as this and that particular kind of man. How dared he? Where did he think he had got his information? Except for the one word "apparently," which he had thrown in merely to fill space and not at all because he felt hesitant about his assertion, his whole statement, not only in the sentence I have quoted but in others somewhat less precise, showed a self-confidence which approached presumption. My closest friends were not so sure of me by a great deal as this jaunty opinionator who would not know me if we should pass each other in the street.

In those first few seconds of amused exasperation I should have been glad to tell my critic that he had somehow arrived at more definite conclusions about me than I had ever been able to make for myself, and I should have been ironically grateful to him for clearing the mists of my own doubt as to just what it is

that I really prefer and most deeply desire. I felt resentful at seeing all my conflicting hopes and fancies, hesitations, guesses, and half-formed resolutions trussed up in this way between a capital letter and a period with an air of triumphant finality. Was this all that the perplexities of living amounted to? I had a sense of being hurried, too summarily dealt with, and I could not feel that the deference always due from one human being to another had been sufficiently observed.

It was not that I found anything insulting or even derogatory in the words themselves, and not in the slightest degree that I thought such empty words could affect what I shall call, for the sake of the argument, my "reputation." After the first shock of surprise had passed I saw quite clearly that my dislike of the sentence was due entirely to the reluctance all adult people feel—or, at least, so I suppose—to being classified. That the classification is often rudely just and accurate does not help the matter much; something deeply hidden in us, presumably our self-love, is always wounded by it. Smith says that Brown belongs in such and such a pigeon-hole; but Brown, although he may like the berth fairly well and may even admit to himself that a good part of him does belong in there, can only think of the precious

fragments of his personality that are ignored by such labelling, and so, for as long as possible, he remains outside, insisting that if Smith only knew him thoroughly he would take a different view. Smith, however, is a busy man, and he cannot be troubled with all the delicate shades and distinctions that seem to Brown so important, and he is likely to think of Brown as inhabiting the designated pigeon-hole whether Brown actually moves in or not.

At any rate, I found myself set down as a pastoral person, as a man with a primitivistic complex, as a hater of cities and of modernity. The impulse was strong upon me to deny the allegation. "I tell thee, O self-confident critic," I said in imaginary expostulation, "that I have spent nearly all my life in the world's greatest cities."

"Which merely goes to prove the truth of my assertion," he answered, making what I had to admit was a neat rejoinder.

"And I would have you to know," I continued, "that I set as high a rating upon our modern civilization as any man, and even wish that we might have a little more of it among critics."

Not visibly affected by this home-thrust, he said that one of the surest signs a man can give of his belief in civilization is a cheerful accep-

tance of the rating society has accorded him, with gratitude that it is no worse. At this point I gave him up and pursued the dialogue no farther.

And yet his assertion about me continued to rankle. Try as I might to interest myself in other things, I could not get it out of my thoughts. "People ought not to be allowed to splash their opinions about in this reckless way," I said. He thought that I could do without music, pictures, theatres, libraries, city streets, the feeling of comradeship in our human enterprise, the sense of pulling my weight in the common effort! Well, it was absurd. He thought that I could gladly forgo everything the toilsome years have taught us and slip back supinely into the woods and pastures, that I could abandon the hope of a great future, which often seems just beyond to-morrow's verge—the hope that somehow and before too late we may capture the machines that now enslave us and set them to work for high human ends. No, no, my friend; not I. You must be thinking of some other man.

But at length I was obliged to ask myself where he could have got such an absurd notion, for I could not suppose that it had sprung up in him spontaneously. Was it possible that I had ever done or said or written anything that

could give him the slightest excuse? If so, I could not remember it. No, really; my conscience was quite clear in the matter. I could not assume any responsibility.

At about this point in my meditations I began to hear the low judicial tones of an inner voice. I knew that it was not the voice of my critic, for it was far more severe than his, and better informed.

"Do you positively maintain, then," the voice said, "that you are a thorough, whole-hearted, and unquestioning believer in modernity, and that the present age seems to you in all respects superior to the simpler past?"

"What do you take me for?" I blustered. "No man is such a fool as that would amount to."

"And have you never indulged any Arcadian dreams whatsoever, any longings for a time less noisy than ours, less boastful, less mechanized—for a time in which critics were more urbane and the Press did not make quite so free with people's sensibilities?"

"Well, of course, I have had the misfortune of being born into the world after Rousseau."

"Exactly. And it has always been your custom, has it, to say only those things that you know will please the spirit of modernity, and

to reserve any doubts you may have concerning the present to yourself alone?"

. . . But really it would serve no purpose to record any more of this conversation, in which I fared, as I usually do in my colloquies with that inner voice, rather worse than I had with my critic. I was obliged to admit, before the dialogue was over, a probability that I had done or said or written something at one time or other upon which the critic had based his idea of me. But that something, I insisted, must have been very slight, and could have represented hardly more than a passing mood, a sense of weariness, a sudden disgust. What right had any man to seize on that and hold it up to the world as the whole of me? The critic should have remembered that no man can reveal his total self in any single act or sentence or page, or even in many books. He had come across some fragment of my full confession, which will never be finished, and had taken it as all that I have to say. So this was the result of all my years of effort to tell the truth about myself —a picture that I could not recognize!

By this time I had begun to cool down, so that I was able to ask myself just why I should expect to recognize what was at best a mere snap-shot taken in a very bad light. There seemed to be no reason. Well then,

since the picture did not remotely resemble my notion of myself, why should I care at all that it went by my name? The fact is that I did care a good deal, and to attribute that caring simply to wounded amour-propre, however correct such attribution may be, is simply to express the problem in another way.

My objection to the picture was not so much to its falsity, I think, as to the fact that it pretended to classify me, to imprison me in a pigeon-hole. Most people of Anglo-Saxon origin —I do not think the same thing holds for the French—have an intense dislike for this process, a dislike resting upon the conviction that a man's essential self is not in what he shows to the world, but is something inward, sacred, inviolable. One does not even know it oneself. It is

> All that the world's coarse thumb
> And finger failed to plumb.

And there was another reason why I cared. In spite of all our Stoical pretences, no normal person is really indifferent to the opinion held of him by his fellows, for that opinion is his social self, an inalienable portion of his personality. Some of us, to be sure, are more sensitive than others in this outermost cuticle, and there are a few who seem to be sensitive nowhere else, but those who are entirely

callous here, as the ancient Cynics wished to be thought, are imperfectly human. One's control over the social self is only partial; it is subject to violence and to sudden accidents that cannot be foreseen; and probably it is for this reason that the half-wise philosophers have been urging us for two thousand years to ignore it altogether and to act as though it did not exist. They might as well advise complete nudity to a man who has allowed himself to become morbidly sensitive about the fit of his clothes. Everyone with the slightest moral fibre is able and willing, of course, to sacrifice the social self in the interest of another self which he feels is far more important, more inward, more vital, much as the warden of a mediæval castle could abandon his outer walls when the enemy had swarmed over them, retiring to his central keep and making ready for a siege; but a sensible warden would hold the outer walls as long as he was able.

The fluctuating and intermittent creature that a man calls his "self" is by no means so simple as we usually assume, being not one but three, and not triune but tripartite. It includes, first, what a man thinks of himself; second, what he hopes the world may think of him; and third, what the world actually does think of him. This third, or social self, walks the

outer walls of the castle in full view of the enemy, and he may be slain there by any hostile arrow of gossip or carried off into a life-long slavery. The second struts up and down the inner works, gaily accoutred though not much of a warrior, and it is mere cruelty to kill him because he has never done anyone any harm. But the first, the man as he sees himself, lies hidden in the castle keep, and to kill him is murder in the first degree. There are at least these three different or separable selves, and one of the most exciting possibilities of Judgment Day is that, when the castle walls are razed, there may stagger out from some deep oubliette a fourth self, quite strange and amazing to the other three—the man as he really is!

One of our main tasks in life, certainly, is to bring about as close a correspondence, as near an approach to identity, as possible between the three selves that are in varying degrees under our control; but this is a task which requires, in addition to the simple honesty that poor stupid Cordelia thought sufficient, great patience, intelligence, and skill. In actual practice the three never do correspond, and the eccentric unpredictable variations of the social self in particular will always demand all the humour and forbearance we can

muster. Perhaps we do well, therefore, to accept whatever tag or label is attached to us for the conveniences of social inspection, for thus, although we may be quite sure that we have been wrongly classified, at least we do get something settled for a time. As for the pigeon-hole my critic has assigned to me, I could suggest numberless objections to it, but probably it will prove as habitable as any other.

Of mountains and hills, of meadows and woods and streams, we can say, and we have said, many definite things. From all objects in Nature that have clear outlines we have drawn some human meaning, or at least we have imposed human meaning upon them. Trees and flowers, birds, familiar animals, even the landscape, have been so humanized by the arts, and particularly by the art of letters, that we see in them chiefly ourselves writ large. Whether this spreading of our mood and thought is a "pathetic fallacy" or not, it has been inevitable; beginning with the earliest savage's first conjectures about himself and his world, it reaches to the poem completed this morning, to the painting still damp from the brush, to the most recent philosophy. But the sea has kept its secret, has refused to take our impress, and from Homer's time to the present has remained outside the empire of the pen. Immeasurably older than our thought, it belongs to a totally different order of things. Subtler than any speech, it escapes every net of words we spread to catch it and goes forth free, unnamed, unknown.

Sitting here on the topmost deck of a steam-

ship in mid-ocean and looking out over the circle of tumbled blue, I feel once more how inept are all the famous passages about the sea that I can recall. They shrivel before this actuality of ocean waste. Byron's hackneyed stanzas are reduced to a sick piping of misanthropy, Swinburne is little better, and even Walt Whitman, who, with his shambling and ungirt strength, was perhaps the most oceanic of poets, comes far short of the mark. Music is what this scene calls for, a music shapeless and tumultuous, scored by Beethoven in his last period for an army of brasses and battalions of tympani. But even that would be an impertinence, for it would not interpret but would merely say over again what the sea says perfectly for itself in its outlandish untranslatable tongue.

Looking out across the water from this high swaying stage, I think that I can understand why the sea has always eluded us while holding us always in pursuit. It is not one but many, so that the word that might have summed it up a moment since would now be misapplied. From minute to minute it alters and shifts, not in the numberless rise and fall of its waves alone, but in hue, in mood, in total character. And yet I have no sooner concluded that change is the essential nature of the sea than I

find its changes swallowed up and obliterated in one monotony. Which of these aspects is the true one? Shall I say that the sea is never for two moments together the same thing, or that it is always and for ever one and indivisible?

(Where does that vaguely familiar phrase, "one and indivisible," come from? Surely I have heard it before in some very different context. Ah, yes, now I remember; but the context was perhaps not so very different after all. The phrase was struck out during that long torture of the human mind to conceive a God who shall be at the same time all things and yet one thing, and it is not surprising that I should recall it now. Nearly all that we have said of the sea we have said of God as well. Once we called it terrible, or kind, according as it thwarted or furthered our wishes, but we have recently come to suspect that it has been merely indifferent to our concerns all along. Until recent centuries we could hardly think or speak of it except in terms of personality and conscious will, but now we no longer believe in Neptune. Yet the ancient problem remains what it was, though the myths that obscured it are fading. The problem of the sea is not unlike the problem of God, and if our thought were capable of solving the one, no doubt we should solve the other also.)

I have been striving for this half-hour, while gazing hard at the horizon line, to comprise the whole world of waters about me into one unitary conception, to see it all as one thing governed by one law and controlled by a single nature. This may be called the theological effort. But, try as I may, I can only think of the innumerable tossing waves, each a separate unit, so that the most perfect word ever found for my purpose is Shakespeare's adjective—"multitudinous." That inveterate particularity of thought, that "love for the creature" which to the older theologians was almost a complete definition of sin, gets between me and the shapeless, featureless abstraction toward which I am struggling. Very well; I abandon that effort and set myself to ponder upon the multitude of the waves, their inconceivable number—not these only that fall within the circle of vision, but those of all the grey Atlantic that surround them, those of the huger Pacific, the waves of the Indian Ocean, and the waves that dance about either pole. Having tried in this way to exhaust the waves of space, I go on and try to add to them the waves of all time, past and future. But here again the mind breaks down and I am forced back into the thought of the one basin that holds this innumerable multi-

tude of waves, to the sweep of tides that sway them, and to the moon that draws them here and there. Thus the sea presents in visible form that ageless problem of the One and the Many which Plato himself could not solve. What wonder that words are helpless before its mystery!

Thought is lost in the wastes of the ocean. It darts here and there, catching at glints of sudden light or feathers of vanishing foam, hoping vainly that they will provide it a moment's support. On the verge of vision a single foam-capped wave catches the eye for half a second by rising a foot above its fellows, and by an almost inevitable flight from the abstract to the concrete, I fix attention upon this single wave, endowing it with a will and purpose of its own. It seems to wave a hand to me across the miles, as though striving to convey some message during its instant of life. Lonely beyond expression on that uttermost rim of the sky, it is waving to me in token of fellowship; no other eye has seen it; we two are alone together in the wilderness of time and space. For an instant, upon that single eye-beam, we flash into one and are merged—the wave and I—and then it sinks for ever, as I am sinking also in a slightly different rhythm. What does it mean, this gesture of hail and

farewell? What symbol is here, or more than symbol? What human significance that just touches the fringe of thought? Some meaning they must have, these uncountable billions of waves tossing here and there all over the globe, lifting white feathers of foam for an instant, rolling a little, beckoning, sinking away, lost. I say that they must have a meaning, if only because the ascription of meaning is a necessary function of thought. They say something not quite intelligible to the heart of a man, something faintly melancholy and noble, like a solemn music.

When I hear men say that they love the sea I do not clearly know what they mean, and it seems to me significant that I have never heard any man say this who has known the sea deeply and long; but when I hear them say that they cannot get away from it, that it keeps drawing them back and back almost against their will, then I can understand. They go back to it in a sort of fascination, as they return to the thought of God, to brood upon a mystery which is essentially insoluble—but they do not really go to think about that mystery, for the sea is soon fatal to thought by convincing it of its futility. Those who love clear ideas, as the Greeks did, and those who find the chief value of life in the intellect, have always instinctively

feared the swallowing mists that engulf body and mind together. Only the northern peoples, half-barbarian amateurs of the vague, have ever been reconciled to it, and I doubt whether even the English and Danes and Norsemen have loved the sea as the fields and hills of home are loved. If by wisdom we mean a dim fogginess like that of a German sage, then the sea may be called wiser than the hills, as it is far older than they; but, like the German sage, it cannot tell what it knows, so that we have to take its wisdom largely on trust. Masterful, violent, ancient of days, it speaks to us not by its tenderness and understanding but by its strength. The hills and fields have their experience written visibly upon them, but on the page of the sea the writing of every moment is erased in the next. Of a certainty, the sea does not love us, as we may so easily persuade ourselves that the earth does. It is still what the Greeks called it, "the unharvested," and the "sunderer of friends"; and although three thousand years have robbed it of its more obvious physical terrors, it is still terrible, because it remains a blank to human thought.

Beauty of a proud wild sort, of course, no one can deny to the sea. No one could sit here, as I have done day after day, without being stirred by its might and grandeur.

During these days I have given my eyes entirely, though never my heart at all, to the wilderness of waves, many-glancing, wide-wandering, ever sinking and ever renewed. Sight is daunted, bewildered, overwhelmed by these endless ranges of tumultuous moving mountains that shift and shuffle and march, hour after hour, no-whither. Dark birds of the middle sea are coursing in and out among the changing channels, dazzling in the sunlight, drenched in the spindrift, riding the foam. Northward, the deep blue is mottled by white caps; southward, there is only the glitter of rough hammered metal; between is the Niagara green of our wake. At every instant fresh mounds of water are heaped and modelled by the swift fingers of the wind.

Beauty there is in the sea, then, but it is a beauty strange to our eyes even after years of familiarity, and I do not think that any man is ever quite at home with it, however he may protest. For myself, I find that I try to escape the water by looking up to the sky, for although that is inscrutable too, at least it arches over the hills of home. Far off there, below the horizon, those hills await me—definite clear-cut forms that have a sure significance for thought. I do not need to be told that the hills are flowing, too, and that they also rise and fall

exactly like the waves of the sea. The important thing is, for human feeling, that the hills rise and fall, flow and dance, to a rhythm somewhat slower than that of the ocean waves, slower even than our own, so that not every instant we spend among them must be a farewell. They beguile our hearts with the illusion of permanence in a world in which nothing ever remains for two ticks of the clock the same. The sea, moreover, is a recent venture of ours, but we have known the hills for a long time. We may well be thrilled by this huge vague voice of the ocean, by the shout of billows answering to billows and the ceaseless whisper of the foam, but we have listened much longer to the music of leaves in wind and rain. "Love of the sea," "love of the One and Indivisible," "love of God"—I do not clearly know what these phrases mean, for all my experience of this emotion suggests that love can be directed only toward definite and concrete things. My thoughts race on before the ship toward the towns and villages of my country, toward the friends who await me there, toward the little fields and hills I love.

VERY winning and pathetic and charged with unintended irony, when we recall it in the light of later events, is the reluctance of Young Romeo to attend the Capulet ball. Such madcap escapades are well enough, he thinks, for frivolous and heart-free caperers like Mercutio, to whom every hour must bring its special adventure, but for his own part he would much prefer to spend the evening in romantic meditations upon the shadowy Rosaline. His reason for this preference, we may imagine, is that in such meditations he would not be committing himself to anything, even to the straits and eddies of that mysterious passion which other men call love; he would be retaining his freedom to feel, to dream, to expatiate in the half-fabulous realms of a young man's fancy. Nothing like cowardice detains him, but only a premonition that by thrusting himself uninvited into the very stronghold of his enemies he will be surrendering the liberty of his youth to a world of which he knows little except that it binds most men hand and foot. Some prescience, some influence which he sees sitting in the stars, gives him warning

that this one step will lead to events beyond his control, and therefore he draws back from it just long enough to reveal a trait of character which is never seen in him again. This momentary hesitation gives us a glimpse of the Romeo that has been, so soon to be transformed into the man of headlong action.

Those fateful seconds of doubt may represent the questioning of all serious youth, which does not know whether the world has any joy like that it takes away, but wonders, groping for an answer which only the years can give. We may suppose, if we like, that Romeo grazes this question with the lightning speed of his thought, finds that he cannot answer it, and so gives the tentative and half-hearted consent to Mercutio's proposal which is all that destiny will need in order to work his ruin. At any rate, there is wisdom as well as pathos in his words: "I'll be a candle-holder and look on."

If he could have maintained this attitude, then—why then, of course, he might have meditated upon the still shadowy Rosaline until she was in her grave and he had declined into the lean and slippered pantaloon. If he had never set down his candle to lift the hand of Juliet, he might have escaped his early death, but he would have missed his "one

crowded hour of glorious life." It would be idle to maintain that candle-holding is a complete philosophy, sufficient for all persons upon all occasions. Shakespeare himself would never have made that assertion, for there are many virile portraits in his pages, such as that of Henry V, to prove that he shared the admiration of his times for men of action. And yet is it not evident that he understood better and felt more at home with the men who stand aside from action? In the character of Richard II, in the Melancholy Jacques, in several such acidulous commentators upon the human show as Enobarbus, but most passionately of all in the Prince of Denmark, he studied the spectatorial attitude again and again, with ever deepening acumen and fascination. And the reason for this abiding interest is not far to seek: Shakespeare was himself a spectator, by temperament and long training. He, too, like Romeo, wished to be only a candle-holder; but, unlike Romeo, although he lived in one of the most stirring ages of history, he seems to have had his desire. He chose to take no part in the dance, but merely to look on.

I am aware that this opinion is counter to a view which has won wide acceptance of late—perhaps because it seems to bring the poet nearer to our own level. Critics and bio-

graphers have made much, recently, of Shakespeare's business interests, even venturing at times to suggest that he was chiefly concerned with box-office receipts. Iago has a few trenchant words about Cassio as a "counter-caster," which would serve my turn well if I cared to express my feeling about these critics, but their view that Shakespeare made *Hamlet* one of the world's supreme poems, instead of the crude melodrama that it had been and might so easily have remained, merely to add a few pounds and shillings and pence to his earnings, is too naïve to deserve an answer. Gentle Will made money, yes; but nearly every shred of evidence, positive and negative, indicates that he was more a witness than a participant in the affairs of his time. There is no doubt that he often felt the same manly respect for the captains and the kings of history that Hazlitt and Heine, and even Beethoven, felt for Napoleon, yet surely a poet may look at a king without wishing to be one.

Shakespeare the spectator never swerved, I believe, from his main business, which was neither to act nor to judge, but to understand and express. I see him, on his way down to the Bankside from his lodgings in Silver Street, pausing no longer among the chafferers

in Cheapside or the pundits of the Inns of Court than he did among the homeless loiterers of Paul's Walk. Not a tithe of his strength and intelligence was given to making the money that purchased New Place, and still less was devoted to winning fame. If he had been really as obscure in his time as we once thought him, he would scarcely have known the difference, for he had other concerns. Wherever he went—in the City, along the Bridge, among the theatres of Southwark, before the gentler audiences of Blackfriars, in the Courts of Elizabeth and James, in Stratford streets, through the crooked, sunken lanes of Warwickshire, or over the Cotswold downs —he brought an alert and learned eye, a tolerant heart, a mind that pierced to innermost meanings. All things considered, we must call him one of the most patient candleholders, one of the supreme onlookers of all time. He was "God's spy."

If anyone should say that a spectator must always be a luxury to the society that maintains him, I should provisionally agree, adding only that he is one of the luxuries we can least afford to do without. Never has this been clearer than it is to-day, when ten thousand of

us are eagerly intent upon "doing things" for one who stops to consider what things should be done, and why. Most of us try to judge before we have learned to understand, and far too many forget, in their haste to render some sort of "service" to the world, that "they also serve who only stand and wait." Now this same standing and waiting is the spectator's special talent. Instead of regarding him as a cumberer of the earth, therefore, we do well to consider how he answers to our particular needs.

At least one such person I have had the fortune to know. His friends and acquaintances will never forget how quietly, yet with how absorbed an interest, he looked out on the turmoil of modern business, politics, society, never suggesting any consciousness of superiority to it although he held himself aloof. His main effort in life was to understand people and events, and when he could not do that he seemed content merely to observe that such and such things were so. Reading widely in several languages, well acquainted in several arts, he never found the time, or perhaps the inclination, to produce anything of his own. He preferred reading to writing, although he could write well; and he would rather listen than talk, although he had usually better things to say than those to whom he listened.

The arena of modern activity seemed to him already adequately filled, and so he sat among the empty benches in great content, with no sense of shirking a duty.

You will say, perhaps, that all this went with a low pulse and deficient physical energy; but in saying that you will be wrong. My friend was as strong a man as any "social servant" or professional uplifter you can name, and he showed his strength by sitting still while all the rest of the world was rushing about. He lived the life of a civilized man, enjoying what was produced by millions who had no time for enjoyment, and would not have known what to do with such time if it had been given them, understanding what was done by those who were too busy in doing to understand anything. Thus he came to know us far better than we knew ourselves; he estimated the motives and the worth of our strenuous deeds far more accurately than we could do; and sometimes he would drop a hint of what he saw in us which opened unguessed vistas.

The world has long been safe and rich enough to afford a few individuals of this kind here and there, now and then—and there is no danger that there will ever be too many. Perhaps we might better say that the world can never be so rich and safe that it can

afford to do without them. The service of the spectator is indispensable, even if he does no more than remind us by his silent example that acquisition, activity, and passing judgment do not fill out the measure of human powers, but that the getting of wisdom is also something, that the shaping of character is an obligation and quiet happiness a duty. I am reminded of a sentence written by William Butler Yeats, I do not know where: "We can make our lives so like still water that beings gather about us that they might see, it may be, their own images, and so live for a moment with a clearer, perhaps even with a fiercer, life, because of our quiet."

As a general thing we do not care at all where a given essay was written, but to this rule there are two exceptions. In the first place, we always want to know everything about any piece of writing which gives us lasting pleasure and to which we return again and again. For my own part, I should like to be quite sure just where Montaigne was sitting when he wrote his little treatise on "Solitude"—whether in his lonely tower above the orchard at Périgueux or at some garret window looking over the Seine towards Notre-Dame. And then, in the second place, there is a kind of essay which cannot be understood unless the reader is told the place and circumstances of its origin. Of this kind I give an example in the words that follow, written down pretty much as they stand, while I was riding through New England on an express train.

Professors of rhetoric have a good deal to say to their students, when they come to that part of composition known as Descriptive Writing, about a mysterious something called "point of view"; and they are accustomed to assert, I believe, that when once this point has

been "chosen" it must on no account be changed without due warning to the reader. They say that a writer has no more right to change his point of view in the course of a description than a painter has to lay two or more pictures on the same canvas. Very well, then; it is clear that I shall have little comfort or assistance from these academic gentlemen in my present effort to show how the world looks from a moving window, at which the point of view changes with every instant of time. So often we find that the rules we learned in our school-days, correct though they were in theory, do not serve the practical and particular needs of later life—and then we have to do merely the best we can.

Let me say while I think of it—for one's few ideas flit past so swiftly here, as though they could not quite keep up with the train—that this particular rule, "never change your point of view," might be regarded by the ill-disposed as highly characteristic of the learned class from which it comes. And indeed, I myself have known one or two academic gentlemen who have observed the rule strictly for many years and under trying circumstances. The same fidelity to an original "choice" may be seen now and then in clergymen, perhaps even in a few essayists—for what is an essayist,

after all, but a sort of clergyman or professor who has lost, perhaps only for a time, the courage of his convictions? And then there are people who not only strive to remain static themselves, but strive to keep everything else so, and weep like Heraclitus to find that nothing ever stands still to be studied, understood, and described. Their grievance against the world is that it insists upon changing at every moment and destroying all their categories. Who that has lived at all has not sympathized with them at one time or other? And yet their position is almost laughably hopeless. They are like the priests who argued with Galileo, feeling prophetically convinced that they personally would not enjoy a moving world at all, and that it would not agree with them.

At any rate, it is a bustling, twirling, animated world that I see from my moving window. All the trees are going somewhere—not my way—in a great hurry. The fields revolve, the furrows rotate, the hills are wheeled into view and out again so briskly, with such an air of saying, "See me too!" that a leisurely beholder is inevitably entertained. All these, together with the haystacks, the cattle, the horses in the meadows, the white leaping brooks, even the very houses, seem to be going on a journey. Are they travelling or

am I, or are we all of us whirling together in some intricate dance, the figures of which none of us understands? Yonder ploughman writing his ancient verses on the tilted page of the hill-side seems to be only amusing himself, and the woman planting seeds on her lawn is not to be taken seriously—for they are engaged, like all the rest of the world, in some strange game by the rules of which they are drawn past me in a long strip full of painted figures. The strip itself moves rapidly, and the figures upon it also move a little, a very little, as though of their own volition and independently of the swifter motion. I never tire of seeing the brooks come tumbling down the green-grey hill-sides and the gestures of elm boughs against the sky. More interesting still, and even more certain to catch the eye, are those apparently independent motions which we attribute to creatures of our own kind, such as the tossing of the handkerchief that a little girl waves at the train. Are they really independent, these human motions that interest us most of all, or are they only figures in the prearranged and mechanical dance? Ah well, an express train is no place for thinking out that problem. All that I can be sure about is that I have a strange, brisk, journeying world about me this April morning—an unaccountably evanescent

world in which nothing is shown that is not instantly wheeled out of sight.

We passengers here in the coach see, and lose in a second, many places in which we should like to pause for a month. Alluring corners in the woods where the arbutus must be blossoming, silvery villages, colonial houses behind tall elms, seem to call and beckon. They look like the very places we have been seeking all our days, yet we are hurled past them in a huge clatter and roar. Not only the places but the people seem to call to us, the human phase of the landscape. We cannot help wondering about these people, who are seen for a second and then, it may be, never again. What things we might have learned from the farmer behind his plough, who knows a great deal about matters we never heard of! What talk there might have been with the aproned women standing in doorways to watch us go by, and with the children swinging on gates! Ah, the price of speed! We resolve that we shall return some day to this place and to that, but secretly we know that we never can return.

Not all our thoughts are given to that outer world as we sit here, some twenty of us, in the "tumultuous privacy" of the coach. Although we are moving at fifty miles an hour, a sense

of leisure descends upon us; we forget our obligations and shed our responsibilities; duty is outdistanced for the time. There is work ahead for all of us, and many have left work behind them undone, but for this hour or day we cannot work steadily at anything. Reading is not easy. It is obvious that one cannot write very well. We may meditate, reflect, or imagine, but we cannot think closely. Our fancies are hurried away or swept into new combinations before we can see them for what they are. On the whole, it seems best to resign the whole conduct of affairs, for the time being, into other hands, say those of the conductor and engineer, and not to push, not to drive, merely to be drawn.

Rather an agreeable experience it is, when once we have become resigned to it, to feel no responsibility whatever, to realize that the wheels are on the rails and that the train will go, with us in it, wherever the rails may lead. This is something like the "wise passiveness" that Wordsworth praised, a virtue very rare in our time which we do well to practise whenever we can. Unquestionably there is wisdom to be learned on railway trains as well as in libraries, and perhaps we may learn even more readily here because we are given time to reflect on the lessons laid before us.

As a proof, do we not observe that all railroad conductors are wise and gentle men? Well, nearly all. And among the railroad porters that I have met there has been, so far as I can remember, not one exception. All have profited by their opportunities.

No doubt we might all learn a good deal from a thoughtful study of porters and conductors. Brakemen I am not so sure about, and I have nothing whatever to say in favour of the young man in uniform who comes through the coach every ten minutes bawling his wares in a vain effort to sell someone a newspaper or a book or a stick of chocolate. If he were a wise man, he would give the rest of us a little peace in which to pursue our meditations, if haply we might become wise, too. But porters and conductors are quiet, restful, not to say phlegmatic men. They think long thoughts—those of them, at least, who work on long runs; they have grown wise by learning how futile it is to push and by allowing themselves to be drawn. They understand, at last, that the painted figures of the strip that moves for ever past their window, whatever those figures may really be, are almost entirely beyond their control.

Well, there is a kind of wisdom in that, and I suspect that several of the passengers in this

coach have not learned as much. One of them I am sure has not, perhaps because he has not been drawn enough. He still has a tendency to push. Because he is not in complete charge of the train he suspects that it is not being properly managed and wonders a good deal whether it will reach its destination on time—as though his wondering would make a second's difference. We are thirteen minutes behind our schedule at this present moment, but the porter preserves an imperturbable calm and the conductor behaves like a Hindu sage already far gone towards Nirvana. It is as though they were constantly imagining how such small matters will look in a hundred years. We ought to study and emulate these wise men, who look out on the always changing landscape with the beautiful peace of old age. They have learned much by observing, day after day, that although the things we desire and should like to make our own for ever are snatched away, yet others as fair and desirable succeed them constantly in turn—and disappear.

What have they learned? Well, perhaps chiefly this: to "see all, nor be afraid."

"O YES, we keep it. What kind would you like?"

"The kind doesn't matter, if only it's very black."

"Must it be fit for a fountain-pen?"

"No need of that, for I never use such a thing."

"Then here is just what you want, I think. This is as black as midnight, and it will last for ever without fading."

"All right, I'll take that then. What do you want for it?"

"Sixpence, if you please."

I paid down the money, took the small squat bottle from the counter, thrust it into my pocket, and walked out of the shop. Sixpence, for enough ink to record every thought and mood and fancy that would visit me in the next six months! I had not gone ten steps before the whole transaction had begun to seem vaguely dishonest. (I mean, of course, on my part.)

Sixpence! And, furthermore, it had all been so simple, and the clerk was so quiet and trustful, as though I had asked him for a bottle

of milk. Stationers' clerks, I find, are often just such phlegmatic unexcitable fellows. They grow so accustomed to handing ink-bottles over their counters that they forget, if they have ever quite known, the nature and powers of their merchandise. But I, for some reason, although I have been carrying on a small business in the same commodity for quite a time now, can never wholly conquer a sort of superstition about ink. It reminds me of that story in the *Arabian Nights* about the genie who was kept tightly corked up when not in use, but who expanded suddenly to enormous size and strength the moment he was released. That genie's prison must have been an ink-bottle, although there is this important difference about ink, that when once you have let it loose all the magicians in Arabia cannot put it back where it came from. It goes on spreading and growing and gathering power for ever.

As I went down the street in the twilight, holding the bottle in my overcoat pocket with a pleasant feeling of secrecy, I made up a speech to the young man of business whom I had just left. "Apparently you do not realize," I said, "that you have trusted me with a charm more potent than Circe's, with a power that might set all London dancing or level the British

Empire with the dust. Think well what you are doing, O jog-trot workaday stationer's clerk, before you push across your counter one of these black bottles of wizard's brew, for dynamite is a babe beside it and nitro-glycerine detonates in comparison like a puff-ball. You smile, do you? Perhaps you suspect that I am indulging in mere rhetoric. Look here, my smug and unimaginative friend, one gill of this black fluid, if spread out thin and fine in just the right way on sheets of paper, would change your comfortable little world so completely in a year's time that you would not recognize it. The thing has been done before, and may be done again. You have lost an arm, I see. Happened in the war, did it? Well, ink took off that arm. Nothing but ink. At about the same time that it was maiming you it was engaged in killing and dismembering some ten million other men. And yet, in spite of all this, you made no effort to find out whether I was a safe man to be trusted with this bottle. You did not even glance into my eyes, wondering who I might be to be asking for ink. No demand for a licence or book of credentials, no reference to the police—merely a request for sixpence! I call it a strange world in which a man must be carefully questioned before he is allowed to carry a revolver but is sold a

quarter-pint of ink without a moment's hesitation. Why, if we could only control the use of ink we should never have to give another thought to the use of revolvers, rifles, rapid-fire guns, cannon, and other such childish toys. Ah, my young friend, doubtless exemplary in thy calling but dull, thoughtless, unspeculative, do try hereafter to think and feel more worthily about ink!"

With such thoughts and eloquence I strode down the street, climbed to my room, and, arriving there, set the bottle before me on my writing-desk and stared at it. The purchase of a fresh supply of writing fluid, vaguely stimulating to the fancy under any circumstances, is not quite the same thing in London that it is in some other cities with less of a literary past. I fell to musing about some of the other black bottles that had been pushed across London counters long before this of mine.

First I saw a round little man in a long robe standing in a shop not far from the Thames, asking for ink. His hair was white under the large cloth cap, and he had a white forked beard, but his eyes, though evidently tired with much poring over manuscript, were still as vivid and quick as those of a brilliant boy. Anyone but a stationer's clerk would have seen at a glance that a bottle of ink handed over

to this man would pretty certainly be heard from in one way or another, but there was no more hesitation than there had been in my own transaction. The little man hid his bottle in the long drooping sleeve of his robe and went out. I knew that he was going straight home to Westminster, and that when he had climbed to his chamber there, he would sit down at once and begin a subtle transformation of the bottle's contents, spreading it out thin by a few million clever quirks and twists of the quill into the first manuscript of *The Canterbury Tales*. The bottle, if I remember correctly, had cost him a penny, for ink was dear in those days. If the manuscript existed to-day it would be worth a king's ransom.

And then I saw another man, as quiet and courteous as the first, standing in another shop—I think in Paternoster Row—and asking for ink. On this occasion there was more excuse for the clerk's apathy, for it was impossible to see at a first glance that this customer was anything out of the ordinary. One saw that he was tired, that he was not happy, and there may have been a suggestion that the sword was too sharp for the scabbard, but I myself would have sold that bottle of ink with a steady hand. And so the clerk sold it, without a word, without raising an eyebrow, between two sentences to the

grocer's boy, who had just dropped in for a pennyworth of sealing-wax. The customer took up his purchase, walked out into Cheapside, turned into Gutter Lane, climbed to his lodging in the house of the Mountjoys, and there, perhaps, wrote that very day:

> To be, or not to be; that is the question:
> Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
> The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
> Or to take arms against a sea of troubles
> And, by opposing, end them.

O proud little bottle of ink, going home to Silver Street, I must rate you king of all your kind, for during the next six months you were slowly transformed and glorified, by ten million rather awkward wriggles of the quill, into *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*. You cost that quiet, weary customer twopence, and to-day the cost of you would stagger the richest man on earth. We know that a single drop of ink will colour a large quantity of water, but you have tinged the whole world. Our thoughts and feelings, our very actions, are different because of you.

These two were noble bottles, and they have had worthy successors. Consider that one, for instance, from which Keats dipped his first fair copy of the *Ode to a Nightingale*, lowering the level of the fluid thereby only the smallest

fraction of an inch. Consider the swift determined dipping that went on at Staples Inn during the evenings of one week while *Rasselas* was shaping and the undertaker was waiting for his fee. Think of the splashing in Doughty Street, with Pickwick climbing into glory and two other novels on the slips at the same time. Noble bottles these, one and all, yet I think that if I were given my choice of all the bottles that have made or contained literary history I should choose the one that was purchased on the Mill Dam at Concord, Massachusetts, eighty years ago and carried at once out to the hut just erected on the shore of Walden Pond. This may not be a lofty aspiration, and it certainly does not reveal a keen business instinct on my part, but at least I know that ink has never been more earnestly and honestly used than it was for two years and two months in that hermitage. If I am willing to leave the bottles of Chaucer and Shakespeare to other collectors, I should be allowed to indulge my humble preference.

At this point I came back to the bottle on my own desk, at which I had been staring all the time. So fresh it was and untried, perhaps the last of all the millions that had been bought and carried home in London. What would Shakespeare have done with it, or

Keats, or even Charles Lamb? Suppose it had been sold to any one of a score of penmen now spreading ink in London rather than to me. Under the hand of X—— it would have become a play to be acted on three continents. With Y—— it would have grown into a novel. Z—— would have found a poem lurking somewhere in its ebon depths, never to be discovered by me. But as things stand—well, perhaps that stationer's clerk knew what he was about after all, and it may be just as well that I did not deliver my speech. Perhaps he knows as well as I do that ink is a marvellous or else a dull and vapid thing according to the man who spreads it, according to the nature and purport of the twists and quirks and pot-hooks into which he transforms it with his pen.

"But come now," I said to the little black bottle, "this is getting gloomy. I admit that you might have had a far more brilliant outlook, but at any rate I shall do my best by you, and we may have some good times together. Allow me to remove your hat. *Allons!* We are off!"

ADVENTURES IN THE DICTIONARY

This little green-bound volume that lies before me on the desk, seven inches by four in size and containing exactly one thousand pages, is in some ways the most remarkable book I possess. For one thing, although it came from the Clarendon Press of Oxford University only a few years ago, anywhere from five to ten thousand years have gone to its making. For another thing, most of the raw materials that compose the other books in my library are to be found in its pages. Finally, this book is packed with information and entertainment mingled and intertwined; it is accurate and marvellous, at the same time serious and farcical, wise and witty, up-to-date and prehistoric. I do not see how more than this could be truly said for the versatility of any book.

Although the usefulness of lexicography needs no argument whatever, the dictionary salesmen who visit me dilate upon nothing else. Never yet has one of these gentlemen, several of whom have been mildly intelligent, said to me in fact or effect: "I assure you, sir, that you will find this work exciting, full of strange and

unimaginable matters, compact of beauty, replete with lore. No novel of our time is more thrilling, no drama since Shakespeare contains more revelation of human nature, and, as for poetry, there has been nothing more beautiful since Homer. In short, I know that you will enjoy this book."

No, the dictionary salesmen whom I have met—or rather, those who have met me—never talk in this way. They turn loose a glib memorized patter about their new devices for indicating pronunciation, or some such thing, with a total disregard of all that really counts in a dictionary which would have moved Dr. Johnson to throw them violently out of the house. All that they can see in words is a base utility, in the final analysis a means of making money. Well, I can see that, too, but it is not quite all that I can see. If I were in the position of these salesmen I should assume that my prospective customers knew already how a dictionary may be used for everyday purposes —such, for example, as finding out for the hundredth time how to spell "leisure" and discovering what species of reptile a mongoose is. People who do not know that a dictionary is good for such things will never buy one, anyway, and so I should devote myself to showing that it is actually readable.

Of course, we must always try to remember that to the dull all things are dull; and even you and I, when we put the dictionary to dull uses, may expect to get corresponding results. Really dull people never have any adventures anywhere, and least of all in dictionaries. For my present purposes we have to assume a person who thoroughly knows how to read—one who attacks any book he has in hand, even the telephone directory, with all he has and is, with the total range of his knowledge and experience and memory and imagination. Such a reader can set forth on endless travels from any one of the thousand pages in my little green dictionary.

I am aware that what we call "mere words" are just now in disrepute, and that our strong silent men of action, ably seconded by their academic henchmen, the behaviourists, have done their best, both by precept and example, to bring them into contempt. Much the same suspicion and dislike attaches to "mere rhetoric" and "mere literature," which also carry with them a taint of the hated intellect. Ever since Thomas Carlyle "preached his gospel of silence in forty volumes," a general inability to cope with words has been regarded, by the stutterers themselves at least, as a mark of strong character and unusual efficiency, as

though language were a sort of sluice drawing off the energies that might otherwise be poured into "action." (Even if it is that, far worse things might be said of it.) And in our own day of *élan vital*—what a perfect shibboleth for a period of deficient vitality!—we hear the implied admiration of dumbness on every hand in such phrases as "gift of the gab" and "fatal fluency." The realization, once common among educated people, that mastery of words is the surest means we know to mastery of thought, of men, and ultimately of oneself, seems to be lost or forgotten in our time.

This impatience with mere words is not confined to captains of industry and their innumerable public echo. It must often occur to one who writes and reads a great deal, and especially to one who makes writing and reading in some way his profession, that he is dealing with his world only at second-hand, from a distance, and that he is missing somehow, in the endless pages of black on white through which he travels, the colours of the outer world which he calls reality. These words, which are his only medium, whether of thought or of expression—what are they but modulated breath? Tenuous, fluttering, ephemeral things, no sooner uttered than they fall silent, they seem too weak to cross the gulf

between mind and mind; and when they are written down they look farther still from anything warm and human. How sure and firm and dependable, in such a mood, seem the materials of the painter's art, the sculptor's, the architect's! And although the musician also works in airy tones that fall at once into silence, even he, with his wide gamut and range of timbres seems better equipped than one who must work with only a few vowels and consonants. Considering all this, we need not be surprised to hear the man of letters sigh now and then for a more substantial medium than "words, the shadows of a shadow world."

And yet you will not hear any conscientious workman in words sigh over them for very long. No sooner has he made his complaint than he is charmed anew by their magic and their power. By dint of long struggle he has learned what every word in his vocabulary can be made to do, what weight of meaning it will bear, what it can suggest beyond its meaning, what rhythms it will fit, with what moods it corresponds. He loves his words as a violinist does his bow and strings. Each of them has come to glow for him with a colour and warmth of its own; he feels its peculiar weight and texture. Words have been his torment, his discipline, and his enduring delight. Better than

any other man he knows the reluctance with which they yield up their inner secrets, but he alone knows the worth of those secrets when they are won. To show how he feels about them in his rare hours of triumph, I quote a few sentences from a man who toiled over words as manfully as any one of our time and who was obliged to find his reward chiefly in the joy of toiling. "Nothing is more mysterious than the power of using words," wrote Edward Thomas. "It is the supreme proof, above beauty or strength or intelligence, that a man or woman lives. Lighter than gossamer, words can entangle and hold fast all that is loveliest and strongest and fleetest and most enduring in heaven and earth. They are for the moment, perhaps, excelled by the might of policy and beauty, but only for the moment, and then all has passed away; but the words remain. And though they may also pass away under the sinking of the stars, they mark our utmost achievement in time."

Rapidly ruffling the pages of my little book, I catch glimpses of a hundred words that have been living on men's lips in one form and another for a hundred centuries. We seldom remember that these frail sounds, familiar to us from childhood, are the oldest living things that men have made, that they are

likely to prove literally more enduring than bronze, and that the Sphinx is a child beside them. Their very age suggests our need of them, reminds us that we have climbed chiefly by their help above the ape and the sabre-tooth, and prepares us to find them suffused with humanity. In every ancient word there must be some mark of our human nature, for it is the child of our breath and is made in our image. The indelible human stamp is so clear on almost every old word in the language that one who knows how to read "mere words" might almost afford to lay all other human records aside.

When the poorest man in the world sets out to compute the vast wealth that has been handed down to him out of the past as his indefeasible inheritance—an exercise to be recommended even to persons of moderate poverty—I think he should begin with words, with mere words. For what thoughts could we have without words to shape and hold them, or what emotions, even, with nothing to give them voice? And someone, let us never forget, had to make these instruments of precision, these rods of Aaron. Simple-minded people, and even some modern scholars in their despair of solving the mystery of language, have held that words were originally a direct gift from

the gods, and of this view we may retain enough to assert that they are, at any rate, a direct gift to us from a godlike faculty in man. For a word, almost any word you may choose, is by no means an immediate and spontaneous growth. It has been toiled for long and hard; it has been earned in the labour of thought, it has been groped for long and long before it was found, it has been lost and saved again many times. We may reasonably think of a word as a tiny but always spreading spot of order reclaimed from chaos and old night. It is a trophy set up on the battle-ground where once, long ago, the armies of darkness were turned back and the legions of light went onward one march farther along their endless way. If that victory had not been won, or if that trophy had not been set up to commemorate it, your thought and mine would have been so much the less precise or wide or fair; there would have been one more gap between the things we can vaguely surmise and those we clearly think, one more gulf between what we feel and what we can say to one another.

Some may find fault with the dictionary because its words are not arranged in any significant order, but this does not disturb me. You can test an instrument almost as well by

touching a key here and there with varying force and pressure as you can by performing on it a whole sonata, and it is in some such way that the dictionary enables one to test our English language. Wonderful tones we come across in ranging up and down that scale—"silver," "reservoir," "vervain," and a thousand others that you could not invent for yourself by any taking of thought. These are addressed to the ear alone, but if you are looking for something more intellectual you will find it on an early page in the word "absolute." How many centuries were required for working out that conception and then pinning it down, and how many for the sister word "infinite"?

So much, then, for the pleasure and constant surprise to be found in dictionary adventuring. I do not mean to imply that this striking a note here and there with one finger is a sign of virtuosity. The skill is in taking the notes by handfuls, making them chime, making them laugh and weep, making them mourn and dance and sing. In that there is difficulty enough, so that anyone who has gained in it even a little skill, or who has learned to delight in the skill of others, can afford to be almost patient with the strong, silent men who sneer at "mere literature" and "felicity of

phrase." Their ignorance is pathetic. Speaking quite soberly, we know of nothing more wonderful than this, that out of a mere mouthful of air a man may shape harmonies that will set the hearts of listeners thousands of miles or thousands of years away suddenly astir. But to play those harmonies, to touch those far-off hearts and minds, one must know to a nicety many thousands of different notes. *O vita brevis, ars longa!* Come, my dictionary!

A THORN OF SPEECH

For some years now I have been accumulating indignation against a certain ugly and intractable syllable of three letters, and the time has come when I must speak out. In what I say I shall be the spokesman, no doubt, of many another patient squire of the pen who feels as I do and has never yet screwed his courage to the point of utterance. All that I have heard said about the workman who finds fault with his tools shall not deter me. Here begins the first onslaught upon "but."

When and how this interloper was allowed to "creep and intrude and climb into the fold" of the English language I cannot say. Where it comes from I do not know and do not intend to inquire, for I choose rather to believe that it has no respectable ancestry whatever—that it is one of those waifs and strays, like "lad" and "lass" and "tub," for which no language has been willing to accept full parental responsibility. Try it once upon the tongue. Does it seem to have been fostered by slow time? Can you detect in it any of the glamour which accumulates little by little upon all really dignified words in their passage

through the centuries? Not an overtone of suggestion, not a single nuance of meaning beyond its own bare signification will you find in it, however hard you try. If it is really an old word, then—and I think I have met something like it in Anglo-Saxon—it has simply misused its opportunities, for it remains as stiff and stubborn and crude as it could have been when its misguided inventor first flung it into our speech. It changes and mellows no more than a flint, which it closely resembles, and will always seem a parvenu.

The very sound of "but" is an exasperation, apparently intentional. Anyone who wants to be quite fair to it, not wishing to have a possibly innocent vocable cried down without a hearing, may make the experiment of saying it over and over softly to himself for half an hour without stopping, and if he does not go mad in the process he will be convinced. As everyone is aware, a quite ordinary word like "oleomargarine" soon grows entrancing in this kind of concentration. "But" becomes intolerable at the third or fourth utterance. Yes, the sound of the word itself is a very unfavourable introduction, and it seems to me that "but" by almost any other name would sound more sweet. The French "*mais*" is not an unpleasing syllable, and it is used, more-

over, in a variety of delicate connotations of which our English equivalent knows nothing whatever. The German "*aber*" is almost a beautiful word, and is even useful as a rhyme. (Who ever thought, until the recent deliberate injection of cacophony into our verse, of placing "but" at the end of a line and trying to rhyme with it?) There is nothing objectionable in the Italian "*ma*" or the Spanish "*pero*." The Latin "*sed*" is, to be sure, a little stony, as Latin in general is likely to be outside of the poets and the best of Cicero. Quite clearly, however, "but" is the worst of the lot.

My quarrel with the word is not so much with the sound, however, for of course we cannot expect all words, any more than we can expect all women, to be very beautiful, as with its meaning and the occasions on which it is used. As a partial explanation of my antipathy, it may as well be admitted that I have a friend who loves to draw me up with a jerk in the midst of my most glowing periods, just when I am getting into my oratorical stride and am beginning to enjoy myself, with this set formula of words: "O yes, that is all very true, but . . ." And from that detested syllable, upon which he comes down with a dislocating violence, he bounces off at a tangent away from

the course of my eloquent and persuasive remarks, dragging the whole conversation willy-nilly along with him.

Only a few thousand such experiences as that are necessary in order to establish a distaste even for a word in other respects beyond reproach, and I have had the sufficient number. "But," I say, is a word that sets up barriers; it means "No Thoroughfare" and forces one either to retrace his steps or else go out of his way. It is a detour signal, a cul-de-sac, a rock in the current blocking the stream of talk. For certainly we should all agree that the purpose and essence of friendly discourse is to flow on and on without check, adding one thing to another, joining and reaching out and stretching always forward. This purpose it fulfils by the use of such amiable and fluent words as "and" or "also," over which the waters of talk flow easily with a sparkling ripple. In the smooth current of conversation "but" is simply a snag. The business of good talk is to assert things, in a large and gentlemanly freedom from carping considerations and minor accuracies. Deliberate exaggeration is one of its favourite devices. Well, "but" spoils all this. It pricks the bubbles of generous fancy, trips the star-gazer, and gives us in compensation only some lumpish and easily

dispensable fact. "But" knows nothing of amenity or social deference. It is a contentious word and a contumacious, delighting in mere oppugnancy, a verbal stick thrust among the spokes of the conversational wheel.

The word is so much the same thing in books as in talk that it would be possible, and perhaps amusing, to divide all literature into the production of the "and" writers on the one hand and the "but" writers on the other. Such a division of sheep from goats, if I had time for it, would fully justify the charges I am making. Here is an example of the latter group which I have just come across: "But Volpone is much more than a mere hunter of oddities; he is himself the most glorious example of the characteristic he imputes. But he possesses wealth to excess." Two "buts," you observe, are butting each other in that passage, and neither one helps the sound or the sense in the slightest degree. If you care to know what the writer intended, I suggest that you leave them both out. Observe also that both of the two sentences begin with the word. Now I think it might reasonably be maintained that no sentence ought ever to begin with "but," and I am fairly certain that no sentence so begun can ever come to much good. Consider

how impossible it is to begin a poem—of course, I mean effectively and well—upon this ugly syllable. Do you say that Robert Browning once tried it? I am not surprised, or even much impressed.

With "and," now, the case is very different, for Matthew Arnold begins a noble poem with this splendid line:

> And the first grey of morning filled the east.

This is audacious, certainly, yet it is highly successful. You cannot help seeing how that initial conjunction links the events of the poem to all that has gone before, not in the affairs of Sohrab and Rustum or in the world of which they were a part so much as in the world at large. It leaves the poem an episode, not a fragment. When one thinks of it he sees that "and" is the best word for beginning any history or narrative whatsoever, as "but" is the very worst.

Of course there is a good deal more that might be said upon this neglected topic, and I should like to say it myself if it were not for the risk of inadvertently using the word in my own discourse—an inconsistency which, up to this point, I have with little difficulty avoided. After this protest I suppose that I shall slip

back again into my old habits, although it is hard to see just why. "But" is certainly not ornamental, and I have just shown that we might get along fairly well without it. Why cumbereth it the language?

My unfitness to discourse improvingly upon this subject may as well be admitted before it is discovered. With chagrin and self-abasement I admit it: my errors of omission in correspondence are as the sands of the sea. Although I have had some practice in the art of letter-writing, in the ethics of that gentle art I have been and am "little better than one of the wicked." After this frank confession the reader may turn, if he likes, to one of the thousand essays written by better men upon my hackneyed and exacting topic.

Let me reveal the depth of my depravity at once, while the mood of confession is on me. There was a time when I kept the half-dozen letters I had not yet answered in a neat little bundle on my desk, held together by a rubber band and labelled *scribenda*. In this way I hoped to remind myself of social obligations as yet unfulfilled, and at the very least that bundle made it perfectly clear that my intentions were honourable. (So far as that goes, I think they always have been.) Well, time passed and the bundle grew, until I was obliged to relegate it to a special pigeon-hole. Very

soon it required two or three pigeon-holes, then a drawer, and finally a large box. A strange thing about the whole process was that the larger the bundle became, the farther I put it away from me. When it was small I kept it before me all the time, but after it reached a certain size I found that I could not bear the sight of it any longer.

To-day that bundle reposes in the huge cavern underneath the window-seat, no longer a bundle really but a pile, a heap, a weltering mass of letters I have never answered—letters that I never shall answer on this side of eternity. Now and then I lift the lid and drop another in, after it has been lying about so long as to sear the conscience. If I should take a stick now and probe clear to the bottom of the pile, fishing up two or three of the earlier letters yellowed by damp and time, I should hardly recognize the names of the men and women, not to mention the boys and girls, who wrote them. And if I should be overcome by the sudden whim to answer one of them, my old friend would rub his eyes when he came to the signature and exclaim: "Who in the world can this fellow be?"

But, of course, I never do go stirring about in this way among the ashes of the past, for there is no more saddening occupation in the

world than the reading of old letters. They bring back memories of enthusiasms and loves now quite burnt out; they remind us of friendships that never ripened or that were killed long ago in the frosts of time. If this or that cordial greeting from a stranger had been answered in kind, how different the intervening years might have been! If one had not allowed such and such a promising correspondence to languish, how much more closely the past and present would be linked together! Ah, the "road not taken"—whither might it have led? We must not ask such questions now, but walk straight on to the end, and therefore I never disturb that pile. Graveyards I rather enjoy, but that window-seat is a charnel-house.

Such conduct as I have confessed to would disqualify me entirely if it were not for one extenuating circumstance: I am one of the most enthusiastic receivers of letters imaginable, and it is only in the answering part that I fall short. No one, I feel sure, can expect the morning postman more eagerly than I do, or see his coming from farther away, or fret more impatiently while he wastes time by inconsequential visits to the neighbours' houses, or greet him more radiantly half-way down the walk, or jerk the advertisements and tradesmen's bills more summarily into the waste-

basket while singling out the one true letter he has brought. And when it comes to the consumption of that letter, there, too, I can shine, for you will not find anywhere a more delighted and sympathetic audience of one than I am. But the trouble is that no one ever gets any credit for these merely passive and appreciative phases of the art. Not by expecting letters eagerly, reading them joyously, remembering them thankfully, and saving them everlastingly does anyone win epistolary commendation, but only by answering them promptly. So far as approval is concerned, therefore, my talents are as good as lost.

There is always a touch of flattery, to which I confess that I am susceptible, in every letter I receive that is in any degree a work of art. That anyone should think it worth while to make a bit of literature for me alone makes me think a little more highly of myself. He must have been sure that my taste is adequate to savour his best things and that his wit would not "sleep in a foolish ear," else he would not have spent his time and skill upon me. Pride of authorship being what it is and has been and will always be, his gift to me implies a trust; it is a courtesy to which only a boor could be indifferent. And I observe, too, that no very high degree of literary excellence is required

in order to convey this effect of subtle flattery. Although I am reasonably sensitive to effects of literary skill, the unstudied graces of human nature are, of course, far more moving and persuasive. If only I can see my correspondent's effort and intention to please me I am nearly as much delighted, though he be illiterate, as I should have been by a letter from Charles Lamb. In reading letters, if ever, we may take the will for the deed.

In writing letters, on the other hand, it is only the deed itself that counts. . . . However, there is another consideration which makes it not quite ridiculous that I should be holding forth on this topic. I mean that although I have never been able to maintain an extended correspondence myself, I have always felt a wistful respect for those who can. This seems to me a special gift, like any other kind of genius. My observation does not indicate that it is wholly a mark of superior intelligence, for one of my most brilliant acquaintances never answers a letter under any circumstances; the utmost to be expected from him is a telegram. No, there is something mysterious about the way some people manage to answer letters, at which I marvel from afar.

Now and then I allow myself to think that I should have done better in the old Roman days,

when an epistle was a rather serious affair, before which one had to roll up his mental sleeves. A man did not get out his tablets and stylus and dig away in the wax for half a day and then call up a slave to run fifty miles over hill and dale with the result unless he thought he had something to say. Accordingly, we find in every epistle of Seneca to Lucilius, not to mention his more serious efforts, a solid core of thought and meaning. In the letters of Cicero to Atticus, for all their brevity and caprice, there is always some turn of thought, or at least of phrase, to make them worth the effort they must have cost. Pliny can trifle, but he always does it charmingly. Perhaps no one has ever written letters under more favourable circumstances than Francis Petrarch, whose choice Latin and beautiful penmanship made his letters such valuable booty that every one he sent out had to run the gauntlet of all the banditti in the Italian Alps. At least that was his own modest conviction, explaining the fact that he always made and kept careful copies. Now it stands to reason that a man will write his very best when he expects, and secretly hopes, that his lines to a private friend will be purloined on the way, sold to the highest bidder, and perhaps published to the world. He will write

his best, that is, in the way of rhetoric, although there may be serious question whether such self-consciousness leads to the best epistolary results. At any rate, Petrarch's Familiar Letters show what can be done under such stimulating circumstances.

I have never seen the interesting fact observed that letters have deteriorated into notes during that very period in which the machinery of correspondence has been brought almost to perfection. Never has there been a clearer example of progress in the apparatus balanced by retrogression in the product. Cicero's wax tablets have given place to the typewriter and the dictaphone, and the work of his deep-lunged slaves is now done by the railroad and steamship, but we do not write better letters than his. No doubt it is true that the great age of letter-writing, so far as England is concerned, fell during the eighteenth century and was made possible by the great reforms of the postal service under Queen Anne, yet the conditions in those years were very primitive in comparison with ours. Most of the real masters and mistresses in this art had laid down their pens before the innovations of Sir Rowland Hill gave England, ninety years ago, a mail system somewhat like that of to-day. Most of them were too early to avail themselves even

of Palmer's mail-coaches, which enabled the Londoner to get an answer from Edinburgh in one week. Did they write better letters than we do—the fact, I think, can hardly be denied—because they wrote at longer intervals?

That explanation will hardly hold if we are to give any weight to an instance taken from fiction. One of the most amazing correspondents on record, and one who fills me with deep respect, is Richardson's Clarissa Harlowe, who flourished in the Dark Ages of the English postal service, long before Macadam. Little do we consider the difficulties she overcame when we read her smooth-running and voluminous epistles, composed at the rate of one or more per day after the plot begins to thicken. She wrote every one of them, presumably, on a single sheet of paper—one can imagine what the size of her handwriting must have been when he sees the contents of that sheet stretching on to twelve and fifteen pages of print—and she used no envelope, because any doubling of the paper quadrupled the postage fee, which, at the minimum, was ten times that of to-day. So far as I can remember, she always paid her own postage rather than leave it to her correspondent, although her funds grew very low indeed, poor girl, before the tragic

end. Her missives were entrusted to coaches that travelled seven miles per hour in summer and five in winter, or, when these seemed intolerably slow, to special messengers of her own hiring. And yet, with it all, how wonderfully she wrote—not only how well, but how much! During the eleven months that Richardson records she turned out, I calculate, about one hundred and fifty thousand words; yet she was not what we should call a professional authoress, and she had several other things to think about. We need not imagine her as lonely in her London lodgings while she still had hidden away under lock and key that feathered confidante, her quill—the first thing that her family and Lovelace try to confiscate. We need not even feel that she was unhappy, considering the inexhaustible materials for letter-writing daily provided. We hear it said that Clarissa's epistolary feats are the most improbable aspect of a highly improbable book, but this is the attitude of the twentieth century, which knows little about such matters. Those who do not believe that she or anyone else could write at such speed would do well to consider the epistolary output of her contemporary, Horace Walpole, as it stands to-day in twenty portly volumes, or, if that does not convince them, they may turn to the still more

voluminous correspondence of the Marquise de Sévigné.

There is no denying that there were giants in those days—or, if one prefers, that we are pigmies by comparison. Think of how Cowper and Gray and Dorothy Osborne poured themselves out upon the page, and of Dean Swift's nightly Journal to Stella. That was the age of the letter, as ours is the age of notes. Sometimes I allow myself to think that I might have given a better account of myself in those times, and that I am really a fair letter-writer, whose lines have fallen to him in a world of note-jotters.

"Remember," says the Autocrat of the Breakfast Table, "that talking is one of the fine arts—the noblest, the most important, and the most difficult—and that its fluent harmonies may be spoiled by the intrusion of a single harsh note." He might well have added another superlative, less questionable than those he uses, and said that talk of the highly finished sort he has in mind is certainly the most highly civilized of the arts. Barbarians are able to dance, compose poetry, and invent music; even savages can paint well enough so that some of our most "advanced" if not most judicious modern painters have taken to imitating them; oratory of an impressive kind is often heard from savages and barbarians alike; but whenever and wherever talking is raised to the artistic level, is cultivated and enjoyed for its own sake, there, we may be sure, is civilization. Where it sinks to the level of mere utility, where its beauty and charm are no longer thought worthy of any effort they may cost, there, whatever other accomplishments such a period may have to be proud of, civilization is declining.

Public oratory of the chair and forum is now, of course, quite dead, and the eloquence that made the reputations of Demosthenes, Chatham, and Daniel Webster is attended to by the young gentlemen of the Press. "Nothing is here for tears; nothing to wail, or knock the breast." The pomp of the orator disappeared without our notice, and we have not missed it; but the conversation of the drawing-room and club and library is in a different class altogether because it is, or was, an art of our own—or an art, at least, in which we all had some practice and at least a chance of proficiency. If the times of good talk are gone by, as they are said to be, then we are all poorer for the loss and life is a good deal less worth living.

During recent years it has become almost a fashion among our critics of loftier brow to take gloomy views of our conversation. They ask us, in their intimidating way, where we are to look nowadays for such a group as that which gathered in the times of Elizabeth and the first James at the Mermaid Tavern. They would like to know what talkers we have to take the place of those who scintillated in the Age of Anne at Will's and Button's and The Smyrna, where one might hear "Music, Poetry, and Politics gratis, with elaborate Essays by Word of Mouth." Nowhere in the modern

world, they tell us, is there anything comparable with the *salons* of Paris in the days of the Grand Monarch, from whence all France and a large part of Europe was ruled, rather badly to be sure, by the witty talk of a few gentlemen and ladies.

Of course, we are all rather fond of these romancers who retire into a "time-climate" suited to their æsthetic constitutions and live there happily for ever after—except for occasional trips into the present for purposes of invidious comparison. Such people are indulging themselves in one of the legitimate joys of forgetting, and it is only when they take themselves seriously and aspire to the title of critics or historians that they need to be narrowly watched. In this matter of conversation one would like to know how they became so sure about the excellence of the talk that went on, for example, at the "Mermaid." All the accounts that we have of that talk were written in retrospect. Drayton, Ben Jonson, and Robert Herrick, when they looked back on the wit-combats of their salad days, were perhaps as much deceived by the mist of time as we are in accepting their praise of great talkers as though it were realistic description. A gramophone record taken on any evening when Shakespeare, Jonson, Fletcher, and the

rest were present in the "Mermaid" tap-room might give a different report. And it is hard to see, furthermore, just how our critics have made so sure about the present state of conversation, for good talk, like the kindred art of letter-writing, has a way of hiding itself in odd corners. Being essentially aristocratic and purposeless, it does not advertise. There may be better talking in the world to-day than we know.

Yet the critics of contemporary conversation might make out an impressive case. They might show, to begin with, that we lack to-day even the physical appurtenances or, as it were, the scenery of good talk. The taverns of old London have given place to cheap restaurants crowded with stenographers. Americans can hardly be expected to converse like the poets of the "Mermaid" while leaning over the marble slab of a soda-fountain—to say nothing of the possible differences in conversational potentiality between burnt sack or canary on the one hand and grape juice on the other. Charles Dudley Warner complained a generation ago that talk round a hole in the floor—known in those dark ages as a "register"—was never quite so good as that to be had about an open fire. Instead of his hole in the floor we now use hot-water pipes, but with no appreciable

improvement in the talk. I have allowed myself to use the phrase "conversation of the drawing-room," smiling sadly while I wrote the words and thinking of the modern "flat." In a mood of architectural determinism one might say that good talk is going the same way that large families have gone and is doomed to a similar extinction, simply because there is no place for it. And so we should come back once more to the servant problem.

Or, again, one might say, although this is more obvious and more generally recognized, that there is no time for talking. Conversation worthy of the name has always been a product of leisure, a boon of which we know nothing whatever. It is a play of the mind, indulged for its own sake; we have little instinct for play and slight respect for any form of activity which does not conduce to something else. We need not wonder, therefore, that even the best talk we hear nowadays is likely to be a gabble of anecdotes or an anxious straining for points, and that this shades off as we descend the scale until we reach the semi-bestial grunts and snuffles of the man in the street. Under such circumstances an intelligent person may well prefer almost any vapidity that flows in over the radio. And we must add that thousands of people who might, with a little effort, talk

decidedly well are deliberately refraining from that effort because of our present affectation of the free and easy, which is commonly neither easy nor free but due to the inverted snobbery of a democratic age. Our talk has too little ease and freedom, and it is at the farthest remove therefore from the Queen Anne "essays by word of mouth." Good talk and good essays have really much in common. There is no shame in talking like a book if only one talks like a good book and not, as Sydney Smith once remarked, like too much of it at once.

Allowing all that we must for the illusion of time and admitting that the "Golden Age" of this and of that is always a figment of fancy, we may still believe that the best period in the art of talking, at least in so far as the modern world and the Western hemisphere are concerned, was the eighteenth century. A new leisure, then first achieved by comparatively large numbers of people both in France and in England, a long peace at home not inconsistent with almost continuous wars abroad, settled government and a very definite stratification of society, played together in producing this result. But something more than peace, prosperity, and leisure was necessary and was provided. In the eighteenth century there was a far more general agreement than we can find

anywhere in the Western world to-day about the basic rules of conduct and belief, a more general acceptance of certain norms of thought and feeling. By this one does not mean that the people of two centuries ago were less individual than we are, but only that they accepted as axiomatic a number of fundamental theories which are now either quite rejected or everywhere in dispute. It would be easy to exaggerate this uniformity, and of course one finds in the pages of Lecky and Leslie Stephen that the century was really torn by intellectual dissensions throughout its course, yet when we speak of "the Peace of the Augustans" we use no empty phrase. Conventions of thought and feeling were then sufficient to bring and hold people together, yet when they had once found common standing-ground their individuality was sufficient to provide those points of clash and friction, those never quite radical differences of opinion, without which talk can never prosper.

All this is changed. Those standards of belief and feeling that were once commonly accepted are now in such grave question that we can no longer feel down to them as the bed-rock of social encounter. It is almost impossible to find, to-day, any considerable group of cultured men and women shaped by common discipline

and education, all of whom accept without question the same basic standards and beliefs. The mirror of society has been shattered into millions of bits, each of which reflects the world at its own peculiar angle. With almost every individual we meet we have to set forth on a separate exploration; almost nothing is to be taken for granted; and no sooner do we approach topics of deep significance and wide implication than we encounter a network of "No Thoroughfare" and "No Trespassing" signs which bar further progress. We run up against inveterate predilections from which there is no longer, as there once was, any appeal to the axioms of common consent. No one feels bound any more to conform his idiosyncrasy to a humanistic standard. What may be called the sense of decency in intellectual matters has been pretty completely destroyed during this century and more of decidedly indecent mental exposure. Individuality, at the same time that it has grown pitifully timid in outward conformities, has come to be regarded as a sacred thing, never to be attacked or criticized. Now all individuality of opinion which is at the same time timidly conventional and regarded as holy is what we call prejudice when we wish to be polite and bigotry when we wish to be quite clear.

How often our contemporary conversations make shipwreck upon this reef! How often, while sailing serenely over a summer sea of friendly talk, we have been brought up suddenly, with a grinding crash, against one of these submerged rocks! No look-out at the mast-head could have seen the obstacle in time, and no amount of seamanship, no skill in caulking seams, will save that conversation. It goes down for ever, leaving a trace—of course a painful one—only in memory. We shall never take that course again, for we know that the rock we have struck will be there for ever, immutable, threatening, rooted in the heart of the planet.

To this it is no answer to say that every age has had its own brand of bigotry, for no age has had a kind so immune to reasonable attack as ours is and so destructive, therefore, of good talk. When your friend in the eighteenth century made an idiotic remark you laboured with him to some purpose by showing, in a rational manner, that he was not entitled to this particular opinion of his because it was out of logical harmony with other and basic opinions which you and he and all other human beings everywhere, ancient and modern, were supposed to hold in common. Under those circumstances talk could go on.

But to-day one can only say, apparently: "I am I, and you are you, and there's an end to the matter. Hold whatever ridiculous opinions you have a mind to, therefore, but don't trouble me with them." Under these circumstances talk cannot be expected to thrive quite so well.

We may say, then, that civilized conversation started on its downward course when the Augustan faith in reason and in the common sense of humanity was first seriously shaken, beginning to give way to "enthusiasm," "inner light," and "private conviction." For this event we must look again to the eighteenth century, in which, side by side with the orthodox faith, we find a protest against all norms of conduct and thought and feeling—a protest hardly more than a murmur at first, but increasing swiftly until it culminated in the violent outcry, the carnival of idiosyncrasy, of recent times. As this protest has grown, opportunities for conversation of the more cultivated sort have become less frequent. The decline was apparently rapid, for already in the time of Dr. Johnson people had come to endure and even to admire a tone of belligerent dogmatism, and by the time of Coleridge they went into raptures over mere monologue. And yet it would be absurd to contend that the art of

talking is quite lost to us even to-day. Distracted as we all are by the vulgar noise and haste of our time, there are still a great many people who deliberately create about themselves the decencies of quiet and of leisure in which alone true conversation can take place. Every conquest they make over egotism and bigotry, every brief excursion they take into the thoughts and feelings of others, brings us all a little nearer to the next great era of good talk.

THE LECTURE MYSTERY

THERE are two things about public lecturing that I do not understand at all: I cannot see why anyone should care to listen to lectures, and I cannot imagine why anyone should wish to deliver them.

The eloquence of the American Indians is not difficult to explain, for it was their drama, their newspaper, their radio. If I were an aboriginal Indian, or almost any other kind of savage, it may be that I could listen to some other man's oratory for as much as half an hour at a time when no other amusement was stirring, but as matters stand, my native savagery being now all criss-crossed with streaks of civilization and as good as useless for listening purposes, I find that I cannot. One of the most remarkable things about the American people is their ability to endure lectures. They subscribe for whole courses of lectures, and attend them, under no sort of compulsion that I can discover. Did they acquire the habit, I wonder, from the Indians? This looks plausible, for it is well known that the people of other lands have no such taste; but even so, the thing is mysterious. Why should anyone

willingly leave his library and go forth on a winter's night to hear a lecture spoken by the most brilliant man on earth when he might sit still by the fire and read a book written by the dullest man? I do not know.

A friend of mine suggests that people go out not so much to hear as to see the brilliant man; but I have reminded him that this man's picture is in all the papers, and he is silenced. Another friend, much more naïve, suggests that perhaps people want to hear what the brilliant man has to say, and I have told him that every semblance of an idea that the brilliant man was ever blessed with is set down in his books—which the lecture-going public does not buy. The mystery remains.

The origin of the public lecture is, of course, well known. It began, at least in its modern form, far back in the Middle Ages, when books were few and far between, when the only good copy of Duns Scotus might be at one end of Europe and the best codex of Justinian at the other. In those days of infant universities a scholar was likely to be a man who had travelled about a great deal, usually on foot, going from one book to another; and when he was invited to lecture before an academic audience it was expected that he would empty the contents of his notebooks upon his listeners'

devoted heads. This is intelligible enough, that books should have been reproduced under these circumstances by the speaking voice; but that the lecture habit, so formed, should have endured for almost a thousand years, holding out to-day against the printing-press and the cinematograph and even the radio, lingering on as a sort of vermiform appendix in contemporary colleges and universities and forming the chief substance in the programmes of women's clubs—in all this there is nothing intelligible whatever. The best we can do by way of explanation is to remember the extraordinary conservatism of the human species.

The heyday of public lecturing fell in New England during the two decades before the Civil War. Beginning, if I remember correctly, at Worcester, and spreading at once to Boston, Concord, Springfield, and then down into Connecticut, the Lyceum systems were soon providing lecturers for half a hundred villages and towns—lecturers who were prepared to speak in popular terms upon any topic of human interest and not a few that lay far beyond it. This was the rather pallid American substitute for the movement in adult education then going on in England. Its immediate success must have been due in part to the fact that New England people, after listening for gene-

rations to interminable sermons, were thoroughly indurated to didacticism and to the human voice in monologue. Either they were proof against boredom or else they expected and rather liked to be bored, which amounts in practice to the same thing. The change from sacred to secular topics was slighter than we are likely to suppose unless we know how little of what we should regard as spiritual there had been in the Puritan sermons, which were often mere lectures upon theology, and how much of moral "edification" the New England lecture contained. In abandoning the pulpit and mounting the lecture platform, Emerson, for example, made less of a change than he himself seems to have thought. The lecturer of those days addressed a simple-minded public still passive to the speaking voice, a people who could tolerate literature and art and science in diluted form but were unable to take them neat. New England is running still on the impetus then acquired.

In all the rich humour and pathos of those Lyceum days there is nothing more amusing or pathetic than the effort of Thoreau to accommodate himself to the reigning mode. No man of sense and learning and literary skill has ever lived who was more unfit for the platform than the hermit of Walden, and he seems to have

written and delivered his lectures, much as he would have written plays in the age of Elizabeth, merely because it was the recognized way of making a livelihood by literature, hating the business all the time and doing it poorly. The record of his unacknowledged failure may be read in his Journals, where he labours to excuse himself for the defeat he never admits, striving to assure himself that any fault there may have been has lain wholly with his audiences. "Talk about reading!" he says—"a good reader! It depends on how he is heard." Well, yes, of course it does to some extent, but not entirely. And then he adds a parable: "I saw some men unloading molasses-hogsheads from a truck at the depot the other day, rolling them up an inclined plane. The truckman stood behind and shoved, while two men standing in the depot steadily pulled at the ropes. The first man was the lecturer, the last was the audience. It is the duty of the lecturer to team his hogshead of sweets to the depot, or Lyceum, place the horse, arrange the ropes, and shove; and it is the duty of the audience to take hold of the ropes and pull with all their might. The lecturer who tries to read his essay without being abetted by a good hearing is in the predicament of a teamster who is engaged in the Sisyphean labour of

rolling a molasses-hogshead up an inclined plane alone, while the freight-master and his men stand indifferent with their hands in their pockets."

Painfully true those words are, but I have quoted them because of their implication of defeat. Elsewhere Thoreau is more explicit. After saying that he always feels that he has cheapened himself when he has tried to interest an audience, he observes, with perfect accuracy, that the public demand is for average men and thoughts, never for anything like originality or absolute excellence. "I would rather write books than lectures. That is fine, this coarse. To read to a promiscuous audience who are at your mercy the thoughts you solaced yourself with far away is as violent as to fatten geese by cramming—and in this case they do not get any fatter."

There is the considered opinion upon public lecturing of one of the half-dozen men in the America of his time who were really worth hearing. There is pain behind those words. And yet I think that we must sympathize with Thoreau's audiences, too, and that we shall do so if we can imagine the terribly earnest little man with the sharp face and unpleasant voice standing tense before his manuscript, reading as though from a book, never lifting

his eyes, with his arms clamped to his sides, trying by words alone to convey his lonely and almost incommunicable wisdom to a roomful of Massachusetts farmers. "The stupidity of most of these country towns," he says, after a visit to New Hampshire, "is in its innocence infantile. Lectured in basement of the orthodox church, and I trust helped to undermine it." Not of such stuff are successful and popular lecturers made.

Sympathizing so keenly as I do with audiences, I always decide in advance when I myself am about to give a public lecture that of course no one will come. Why should anyone? If I were another man I should not walk across the street to hear the man that I now am deliver a lecture—not, at any rate, if I knew as much as I do now about the eleventh-hour-and-fifty-ninth-minute rush in which most of my lectures are prepared. And yet I have never lectured to a room entirely empty. People have come to hear me not merely from across the street but from blocks away, and they have even paid down hard money at the door. Reader, you would be surprised, although certainly not any more than I always am. And people have come up to me after lectures to say how much they have enjoyed them. Honest-looking people, I mean, whom

one feels almost obliged to believe. I cannot make it out.

Now that I have confessed that I sometimes give lectures myself, it may seem that I should be able to throw some light upon the second mystery named above, but it is not so; the more lectures I give the more difficult the problem seems to me why anyone who can gain a livelihood at unskilled labour should engage in this kind of work. It is always when I have just finished a lecture and am on my way rejoicing homeward that the question seems most insoluble. I promise myself that this lecture just safely over with shall be the last, and I look back with humorous compassion upon my platform career somewhat as one may upon a period of boyhood which he can no longer comprehend. And then, a week or so later, someone asks me to give another lecture somewhere, and . . . I do. Clearly this is a strange thing in human nature which has not been enough looked into. We are treading unexplored territory.

But there may be one or two of my readers who have never given a public lecture and who will not fully understand, therefore, how remarkable it is that anyone should be willing to do so. In the interest of these few I must be more explicit. Let me recall the patient

listener who had heard me read *The Dauber*, *The Everlasting Mercy*, and *The Daffodil Fields* on three successive days, and who asserted vigorously after the third reading that the man who wrote those poems could not possibly be a good poet, as I may have implied, because they contained "so much bad language." Let me recall the young women to be found in almost every audience who come forward after the lecture to reassert, argumentatively and with intent to refute you, the main points you have tried to make. Let me recall the clubs of the wealthy that offer fees of twenty-five dollars, the clubs that send flowers instead of a fee—not that lecturers as a class do not care for flowers!—and the clubs that think it an affront to one's dignity to send anything. Then there are the clubs that tell you about the "talent" that has (or should one say have?) been glad to perform before them "merely for the advertising"—a form of invitation which one usually declines, on the ground that after he had given his lecture he would still be in debt to his audience to an indefinite amount. And finally let me not forget (as though I ever could!) the very imposing woman who sat in the front row of one of my audiences and shook her head slowly but firmly from side to side, in emphatic

disapproval or disbelief, at the end of every paragraph.

Am I beginning to make it clear that there is a real mystery in this matter? Add to what I have said that a lecture which has succeeded brilliantly before one group of listeners may fail dismally, for no reason that you can imagine or discover, before another of exactly the same sort. There are some audiences with which one seems to have been born and brought up, so instantly do they seize one's thought and thrill with sympathy; but then there are others as unresponsive as a prison wall, not a smile coming from them, not a frown, not a look of comprehension or even of dissent. It is when he comes before an audience of this latter kind—and no one can foresee when that may happen—that the most hardened lecturer on earth would cheerfully exchange places with any other man. The ditch-digger is performing a necessary task and earns an honourable wage, but he is about to receive money under false pretences. The man about to be hanged still has some hope of reprieve; he has none. While his tongue and lips stumble on through words which he hopes are making some kind of sense, his thoughts are racing back and forth seeking some avenue of escape. They climb mountains and

dive to the under sea; they hunt for shelter in ancient Mesopotamia and in the unimagined future when lectures will be forbidden by law and remembered chiefly as we recall the tortures of Torquemada. But his thoughts do not find any refuge. They come circling back to the question: "What is the matter? What has gone wrong?" O all of you who have sat comfortably, though somewhat impatiently, in chairs, letting the lecturer do all the work, forgetful of the fact that in order to have good lectures we must have good audiences too, how little you have guessed what thoughts were his! More than once in the dead waste and middle of a lecture that has gone in this way I have heard a sad voice proclaiming deep down in me: "Never again! Never again!"

How is one to admit, after saying all this, that the chief reason why he goes on lecturing is that he enjoys it? If there is an inconsistency, I must let it stand. The lecture is a by-product of the literary workshop, and anyone can see why it is an agreeable variation to those who have to express themselves for the most part through the written and printed word. It has the defects of monologue, to be sure, but at any rate it has not the vices of soliloquy. To see one's audience and to be seen by it, to substi-

tute gesture and facial expression and the intimate thrill of the voice for all the shadowy symbols of the page, this is the charm that has made lecturers, on occasion, of Emerson and Thoreau, of Carlyle and Arnold, even of Thackeray and Dickens. I can even understand, to some extent, why the strange people who compose audiences should prefer the speaking voice to the printed page, although I do not share their preference.

It seems to me that a lecturer who enjoys his work and persists in it through weariness and disgust and disillusionment must be something of a humorist, and to that extent at least a lover of his kind. If one has an insufficient stock of humour he will soon leave the platform, but if he has a good deal it will grow. Naturally, it is well for him to have something to say and a graceful way of saying it, although these qualifications are often dispensed with, but he must have a large faculty for laughter which is neither scornful nor sentimental and is directed as much at himself as at his fellows. Yet he must see their follies, too, not derisively, but unerringly. He must know the capacity and the power of the public mind somewhat as an actor knows them and as the mere author very seldom does, for his work is that of the author and the actor combined. In short, he

must be a delighted spectator at the Human Comedy, not too dignified to take the stage himself when he is invited and to play whatever part of zany or of sage the mood of the hour may demand.

THE LONG AND SHORT OF IT

Some people prefer the short sentence.

They think it sounds more honest than a long one.

Their ideal is a sentence blunt, direct, explosive.

A book appeared recently which contains nothing but short sentences. It was written by a famous American.

Reading this book is like jolting in a springless wagon over a corduroy road.

Some people like this kind of reading. It seems to wake them up.

Others do not like it at all. They would rather sleep than read that famous American.

They think the short sentence too elementary.

They say that it exaggerates, and also eliminates, too much.

They complain that it has no rhythm.

They prefer long sentences.

Whether it be that the prevailing practicality of the times in which we are now living has a tendency to make us somewhat impatient of and insensitive to those more delicate and more difficult graces of style which are attainable only when writers approach their work in

the mood of cultivated leisure and when readers also, in their turn, are not only able but willing to take time for enjoyment, to linger with delight upon the deft turning of this phrase and that as a connoisseur of wines pauses to savour each and every sip of an ancient Sauterne, and to listen for that total harmony of style which is to be heard only when a clause is finally closed and its reverberations die away like the hum of some rich instrument, or whether it be that the prevailing and all but lethal influence of daily journalism has tended to abbreviate our periods and cut short our cadences so that he who commutes may read and the travelling salesman, though a fool, may not err therein, or whether, finally, the reading public of our time—immensely greater in size than any other reading public that authors have ever before been called upon to address, and therefore, as we may surmise, somewhat less intelligent as a whole than the public of less democratic days—is no longer capable of understanding those elaborate patterns of words in which many divisions and sub-divisions mutually depend upon a single primary statement and all are closely knit together in one grammatical nexus, certain it is in any case that we may look far and wide, long and

patiently, with the eyes of Argus or with the presbyopic vision of a professional proof-reader, in what passes for the literature of the last ten lustrums without encountering any single congregation of words brought together between capital letter and period that can stand for a moment in comparison with those intricate, enormous, sesquipedalian sentences that pour so voluminously down the pages of the younger Ruskin, gathering might and majesty and magniloquence as they flow, winding almost interminably on and downward with neither haste nor rest round many a comma, semi-colon, dash, and asterisk as though such a superfluous mark as a full stop had not yet been invented among the devices of punctuation, as though Time had been annulled and we were sitting down to read in some quiet ingle of Eternity, and as though the author had intended when he wrote them down that they should be read forth in the voice of Boanerges, son of thunder, or intoned by the lungs of Titans; for although those ample sentences of the leisurely old days give the reader some reason to expect, or at least to hope, now and then, that they are at last coming to an end, yet they never do quite come to an end, or almost never, but rather they delight in disappointing such premature

expectations and in going on again with renewed vigour, just as Antæus of old was wont to double his strength whenever he touched with foot or hand or shoulder the reviving soil of his mother Earth, so that, having just grazed a full stop by the fraction of a hair as a skater does a hole in the ice, they move serenely on and out again past colons and semi-colons and dashes and asterisks and commas into a solemn grandeur of entirely unpunctuated print wherein the devoted reader loses for a season all notion of locality and all thought of time and merely floats in a blessed trance on and on from line to line with nothing whatever to guide him except the confident assurance that he is in the keeping of an excellent pilot who knows the channel and all its soundings by heart and who will bring him safely into port when he decides that the time has finally arrived for doing so but not a moment before that time arrives, he being a most leisurely and easy-going pilot who enjoys the river scenery far more than he does the harbour that waits at the end of all, who loves to hear the knocking of little waves against the prow of his craft and the rustle of the wake behind, who takes a keen pleasure in the dip and sway of the deck beneath his tread and in all the subtle rhythms of a ship that answers to the swing of

broken water, so that those who embark with him upon a sentence might almost be advised to bid farewell to their friends and to wind up all their affairs, seeing that for a long time they must entrust themselves unreservedly to his guidance if they are to have a prosperous voyage, never offering to snatch the tiller from his experienced hand or betraying the slightest desire to land at any of the numberless piers and wharves he passes calmly by, contenting themselves with admiration of the consummate skill he shows in his steering, content with the knowledge that however bewildered they may grow on the lower reaches and wide-spreading estuaries of a sentence that widens slowly towards the close in masterly rallentando, he, their pilot, is never bewildered at all because he has clearly foreseen the end of his sentence in its beginning, has looked quite through from capital letter to period, from Alpha to Omega, and is keeping his alert and expert eye steadily fixed not only upon the channel ahead but also upon the chart of that channel which he has prepared afresh for this particular voyage—a fact which any patient reader may readily deduce from the certainty with which he steers his way among the multitude of shoals and bars that obstruct the current as well as from the observation that

however interminable the sentence may seem to him, the reader, and however numerous or even wearying may seem its detours and ramifications and serpentine meanders, yet the meaning of that sentence is at every moment pellucidly clear so that a grammarian could parse it and a child could paraphrase its thought in a few words, although the grammarian might possibly wish to break it up into a hundred or so of its component parts and the child might innocently wonder whether perhaps the printer whose ill-fortune it had been to set it up in print had not found at the last moment that his stock of periods was temporarily exhausted, the truth of the matter being, however, that the printer to whom that evil lot has fallen has still an adequate supply of periods in his font and that one of them will certainly be forthcoming when the younger Ruskin feels that the proper time for it has been reached, but until that time arrives—if we may now return to our metaphor—he, the pilot, must ask us to keep our metaphorical seats, to exercise a little patience, to remember how much more blessed it is to travel hopefully than to have arrived, to observe the excellent landscape through which we are passing all the time, and not to expect of an author that he do the work of a

painter and a musician and an architect and a solo dancer all at once, as he, the younger Ruskin, is cheerfully prepared to do under the proper conditions, unless we are willing to give him a certain elbow-room, reposing in him meanwhile an unquestioning faith that the same man who has dared to lead us out upon this Odyssey of words will know how to get us home again and will bring us in due season, after wide and various wanderings, after showing us the wonders of the sky and earth and sea, after delighting our ears with volumed harmonies and blessing our eyes with deep expanses, will bring us, I say, at last—oh, at long last!—somewhat surprised and perhaps a little breathless, not hastily or abruptly, to be sure, but by gradual and easy approaches, like those of a yachtsman who prides himself as much upon his skill in landing as he does upon his sailorship on the open sea, to the end, the goal, the conclusion of his sentence, that is to say, to the full stop—in short, to the period.

Some people prefer short sentences.

Others prefer long ones.

On the whole, I prefer them neither very short nor very long.

For the last ten minutes I have been turning the pages of Hall's *Chronicles of England*, reading a sentence here and there in the clear black-letter and weighing a few of its stately cadences on the tongue. A noble tome, as Dibdin himself asserted, is this first edition of Hall, and my copy, bound in the original pigskin, is perfect in every detail, even to the woodcut of Henry VIII in Council at the end. The book extends to some eleven hundred pages closely printed in folio, and it cost, I should say, a good plump sovereign when it first came from the shop of Richard Grafton in 1548. We may multiply that sum by ten or twelve to get a rough notion of what the volume cost its first reader in present-day "buying-power."

At a first glance into this book, so long, so costly, and so hard to hold, one doubts whether it has ever had any readers whatever, and suspects that it has always been merely the handsome piece of furniture that it is now, I freely admit, on my library shelf. A brief examination clears that doubt, however, for the book contains abundant proof that it has been

read a great deal, and by many different people. Not to mention the thumb-prints trampling thickly up and down the pages and a slight hollowing along the outer edge, I have found among the marginalia no less than a dozen different handwritings, most of them Elizabethan, but two or three extending into the eighteenth century. Although the book has been carefully handled throughout its long life, having been always regarded as something of a treasure, it bears evidence everywhere of much honest and intelligent use by people who have loved books. In an almost literal sense, therefore, it is a "human document," revealing aspects of English history which its learned author did not live to record and would certainly have thought beneath his notice if he had known them. The mere fact that such a book has been read and cherished is historically significant. It is longer than ten ordinary novels and weighs more than ten times as much as any ordinary book of our time, yet the evidence is clear that human eyes had searched it often from cover to cover long before I came across it last summer not far from Exeter Cathedral, that magnet of noble books, and bought it for three guineas.

Chronicles of England, indeed! Hall's vivid narration, particularly where he deals with the

union of York and Lancaster, makes decidedly good reading, but I find myself more drawn to the margins than to the text. For these marginal jottings, too, are history, when properly understood, and they are by just so much more interesting than anything that Hall has to say as the discovery of facts for oneself is more exciting than mere information. They require, if I may say so, some patience and ingenuity, perhaps even a little imagination, of their interpreter, but they are worth the effort they exact. By means of them I have learned something about the people who owned the book before me and so have traced a vague outline of the volume's past.

First of all in the long line of succession I see the original purchaser, who brought the new book home to his lodgings from Richard Grafton's shop three hundred and eighty years ago. I do not see him lugging so bulky a parcel down Fleet Street in broad daylight, however; in the first place because he was certainly a gentleman, and in the second because this book was prohibited by Queen Mary almost immediately after its appearance. More probably, he sent his man after it, or else left an order with Grafton to have his devil bring it round after dark. All this may seem mere conjecture, though I think it is not, but

certainly the first owner of my book was, or rather had been, a gentleman of the Court, and was no longer young. I assert this not at a hazard but with good reason, for he shows a very special and minute kind of knowledge such as no one but a courtier in the later days of the eighth Henry could have acquired. Several times, in passages in which Hall lists the lords and ladies who attended this or that function of state, he has crossed out name after name and added others, showing a perfect confidence that his information is more accurate than the author's own. Seeing that he asserts this knowledge only with regard to the last ten years or so of Henry's reign, what is one to conclude except that he was himself present at these functions in some capacity?

Was he one of those parasite upstarts, like the first Cromwell, who fattened on Henry's spoil of the monasteries and so began that iniquity of Capitalism the tale of which is not even yet half completed? Was this very book first bought by the silver of some crucifix melted down and going cheap? Such an assertion would be a wild conjecture—and yet, there was the opportunity, and human nature has always been very prevalent.

He is sitting in a latticed window that looks out over the Thames as he reads in his new

book. Shouts of watermen come in from the river, borne even from the Surrey side, with the raucous cry of swans that are swimming among the barges. A noise of musicians plays for a few minutes beneath his window, and somewhere up toward Paul's the apprentices are to be heard engaged in one of their customary encounters, but my gentleman reads on and on in his country's annals, turning leaf after leaf. He is renewing his youth, living back again into those golden days when King Hal himself had been young, witty, brilliant, a lover of music and poetry—nay, something of a poet and musician in his own right. Those had been the good days, before the great King had changed so strangely into a diseased and savage beast, and long before this fiendish daughter of his had filled her court with her blood-thirsty foreigners. That good time is gone now for ever, he is getting old, and there is really nothing better to do than to read this new book by Edward Hall, who died last year—not so bad a book as you might expect, considering how little Hall could have seen. Now and then he dips a quill—a very bad one it is, in great need of cutting—into the inkpot at his elbow, and makes a marginal correction in an almost illegible scrawl.

Next in order among the readers of my book,

if I am to believe two good judges who have examined it, was the Virgin Queen herself. On the seventh leaf of the second part are two lines from one of her sonnets, written in the clear Italian hand she learned from Roger Ascham, and beneath them stands the name "Elizabeth," just as it is to be seen at the end of hundreds of her state papers, except that the terminal flourish is here far less ornate and the final R is lacking. If Elizabeth really did write these words, she must have done so before she came to the throne, perhaps during one of her stays in the Tower or, as I should prefer to think, at Hatfield House. To tell the truth, I cannot quite make up my mind to believe that the writing is hers, although it is at least startlingly similar to all the manuscript of hers that I have seen and bears comparison letter by letter. The little faith I have is due in the first place to the difficulty of supposing that anyone who wrote an Elizabethan hand, such as this unquestionably is, could have had access to the Queen's private sonnets, or, having somehow had a sight of them, should have thought of copying the lines from them in the Queen's handwriting and backing up the forgery by the familiar signature. The question concerns not only the method but the motive. And again I am obliged

in this instance to place an unusual dependence upon the expert opinion of others, for the two good judges to whom I have referred—one of them a poet, who has given years to the study of Elizabeth's character and career—are both friends of mine and both ardent lovers of books. Does it not stand to reason that they would denounce this jotting as a forgery unless the admission of its genuineness had been, as it were, wrenched out of them?

So, then, I allow myself to imagine Belphœbe herself bending over these pages in her studious and eager girlhood, learning from them something of the consummate craft which made possible one of the greatest epochs in history. But I do not even try to imagine that she ever owned the book, for in her time it was still expensive and she was always rather a borrower than a buyer of such things. According to this assumption, she rewarded the owner abundantly, as Coleridge was wont to do on similar occasions, although it is clear that the owner never saw the additions she made, else he would not have let the volume so soon out of his hands. (And I rather doubt whether the bookseller in Exeter who sold the volume to me ever saw them either.)

Omitting three or four undistinguished hands, I come to the reign of James or that of Charles,

when the book was owned by a barrister or by some gentleman of the Inns of Court. This I judge from the many notes written in a legal hand of the period upon passages illustrating the history of English law. The writer of these notes read carefully through the first half of the book, which is of comparatively slight value as history, and then dipped here and there in the later pages, those dealing with the reign of Henry VIII, where Hall is a first-hand authority.

Half a century later still, at some time after the Restoration, the book was carefully read by a man of considerable learning who was chiefly interested in ecclesiastical history. I should like to think of him as a country clergyman, who found time to indulge any number of literary hobbies during the winter evenings by the fire, but this is hardly probable. We know too much, from John Eachard's *Reasons for the Contempt of the Clergy* and similar sources, about the literary tastes and the poverty of country parsons in this period to indulge such a fancy. One of the giants of the London pulpit, such as Barrow or Tillotson or South, might have owned the book, for these men read everything.

After adding to the annotators already mentioned one "Kathryn Snoden," who has

practised her signature all over one of the pages, I have completed the list of people who owned or used the volume during its first century and a half. Their jottings can be dated accurately enough by the handwriting alone, but with the opening of the eighteenth century this clue becomes less trustworthy. During the last two centuries and a quarter, moreover, the volume has been read much less than it was during its first hundred and fifty years, for since the time of Queen Anne it has been definitely an old book, a curiosity rather than a useful thing, no longer a source of information but at best an example of strong, pure English. During most of this time it has been lying, I suppose, in the libraries of fox-hunting squires and port-drinking bishops, who, if they ever drowsed over its pages after dinner, have left few traces behind them. No holes burned by glowing tobacco, no wine-stains, no lamentations over the dangerous encroachments of the middle classes—since the close of the seventeenth century the volume's history is almost a blank.

Yet I do find definite evidence that the book fell, for at least a few seconds long ago, under the attention of a maiden by the name of Mary West. For some reason that I cannot explain, Mary interests me more, lives more

vividly in the fancy, than any other of my predecessors—even the Maiden Queen herself. It is such a small, frail pen-print that she has left here on the page of time, such a tiny note in the chronicles of England, that I cannot help wondering whether she set her mark anywhere else upon the hasty forgetful world or whether this is all there is left of her. There is nothing to guide my conjectures about Mary West; she comes for only a few seconds out of the darkness of the past, and then goes back into the darkness that has hidden all but a very few of England's numberless millions. And this is something that Edward Hall never guessed, could not possibly foresee: it is about such people as this little unknown girl that we of to-day would most like to learn. How gladly we should exchange a thousand pages about his furious, uxorious, or feebly pious Henries for a few accurate paragraphs about Mary West and her kind! But Clio has always been a snob, closely attentive to the current conventions of social rating.

I think that Mary was about ten years old when she chanced one day into her father's library and saw this vast brown volume lying open on the table. She knew that she did not belong in the library and that great books like this were not for little girls to make free with;

but, nevertheless, there she was, staring at the book. It may have daunted her a little, so dignified it was, so huge, weighing half as much as she did, but yet she was not easily frightened; there was a spark in her of that audacity by which history is made. The black-letter type was so strange in shape that she did not try to read it, and she may have thought that the book was printed in some foreign language; at any rate, the dreary talk about dead kings and queens would have been nothing to her, in whom the warm life was beating, for whom the whole roseate endless future lay ahead. Whether she was moved by some half-conscious sense of the power that life always feels over the past I cannot say, but at any rate she suddenly yielded to a mischievous whim. Snatching up her father's quill, she half wrote and half drew, here in the lower right-hand margin, the words "Mary West—Her Book." She made no attempt to write in handsome letters, as Kathryn Snoden had done a hundred years before, but got the words down as fast as possible, lest she be interrupted.

Ah well, it was a long time ago that Mary's hand rested for a moment on this yellowing page—some two hundred years ago, as I make it out, and that is a very long time indeed for little girls if not for black-letter books in pig-

skin bindings. The page itself, made of a paper far more durable than we can afford to-day, is as strong and clear as ever. The ink in which Mary wrote her name has not begun to fade, but the hand that rested on this page and scrawled these letters—where and what is that?

Very clearly I see Mary standing there by her father's table, as though she were painted in a picture. She is dressed sedately in the fashion of grown women of her time, and her serious blue eyes are dancing a little as she draws the lines. When the words are finished she throws down the quill as though suddenly amazed at her own boldness—for see, here is the blot it made in falling—and runs out of the room.

SHELVING SYSTEMS

I CAN remember a time when the arrangement of my books gave me no trouble whatever. In those days I had a rather dark and distant corner in my library in which I stowed volumes of German metaphysics, modern cook-books, presentation copies, telephone directories, and such-like literary lumber; and then there was another corner, still darker and farther away, where I kept my few inherited theological tomes. Near at hand, in the light of the evening lamp, were the two or three hundred books that I really cared for, the stained and lop-eared bescribbled veterans which I had read through so many times that I knew I should want to read them through many times more. And between these two extremes, stretching down the twilight from Homer, who was a little dim, to contemporary poets, who abutted upon the telephone directories, lay my selection from the literature of the world.

This arrangement I found very snug and convenient, because it had grown naturally out of my own likings, indifferences, and disgusts. I always knew approximately where a given book was to be found as soon as I asked

myself how much I wanted to find it. If I wanted it very much, then it must be within reach of my chair, but if I wanted it very little, then it was certain to be so far down the room that I should not be repaid for the effort of search. That book-room, therefore, was a roughly-drawn map of my mind, and any clever person might have made a fairly accurate guess at my interests and character merely by observing the geographical distribution of the various kinds of literature it contained and measuring their respective distances from my lamp.

For several years I lived at ease in this age of innocence, and then—well, I got married. You would not suppose, perhaps, that a little thing like that would be able to destroy an admirable system of arranging books such as I had evolved, as the spider spins her web, from the very stuff of my own nature; but, at any rate, it did. Things have never since been the same. Almost immediately, and for the first time in my literary career, I was brought to consider books as furniture. It was pointed out to me with great cogency that some of my best bindings were hidden away in obscure corners, while certain broken-backed favourites of mine usurped their rightful places on just those shelves to which a visitor's eye would certainly

stray. Accordingly, the well-dressed parvenus were advanced to positions of honour and my old, old companions were all banished into outer darkness.

Since that day nothing has prospered in my library, and my books have not had a year of peace. As well might the British Empire attempt to substitute a written document for her Constitution, which is the natural efflux of the national mind, as I to find a reasoned system of shelving books to replace the old instinctive method that worked so well. I have tried a dozen different schemes of classification, striving to effect a compromise between my wife's excellent taste in bindings and my own notions of literary merit; but none of these has really worked. Indeed, they have all broken down so badly that the impossibility of finding any book when I want it has driven me to attempting a card-index. This index will never be completed, but even if it should be, what a substitute for that old arrangement of mine, so simple, so self-explanatory, so comfortable!

A main defect in all the classifications I have attempted has been the difficulty of remembering where æsthetics leaves off and system begins. Realizing, however, that I have had to work under peculiar disadvantages, I set down here a few of my unrealized ideals for

the benefit of those who may have a freer hand.

It is fundamental, I suppose, that shelving systems are devised for the convenience of readers rather than to display the ingenuity of professional cataloguers. Their primary purpose is to bring the right reader and book together at the right time. But here, as in so many other human concerns, one is confronted by the troublesome fact that there are still, in spite of all our efforts, several different sorts of people. Any good arrangement of books, therefore, must conform to one or more of the chief lines of variation among human beings. I am sorry to be obliged to speak so learnedly, but this is a serious topic. Before one can make an intelligent choice of a principle of classification he must ask himself what these chief lines of variation may be.

Well, among others, there is the chronological. The fact is insufficiently observed, and almost never acted upon, that human beings are still ancient, mediæval, and modern; for it is a gross error to suppose that all the individuals belonging to these several classifications have been accurately distributed into their respective niches of time. We assume in our

callous way that all the ancients, for example, are dead; but our assumption does not abolish the many who are still among us. Consider the plight of a man who could feel at home only in the Athens of Pericles and who is forced, by some slight error in the temporal distribution of souls, to speak our barbarous language, to look at our public buildings and monuments, to read our books and newspapers, to wear our ugly clothes! Think of the belated Elizabethans who go up and down Fifth Avenue, trying to look comfortable in the twentieth century but in reality about as happy as the menagerie polar bear on a torrid August day! The fact is that most of us are astray in time; and when you consider how the centuries have been stirred and beaten together to make that hasty pudding which we call modernity, it is no wonder. If we could declare a universal "home week" there would be an almost inextricable tangle of traffic along all the raying roads of time; but such a holiday would be worth the trouble it cost because much of our modern unrest is simply nostalgia, and many of our unhappiest moderns have merely got lost among the years.

Only the library stands between these temporal waifs and utter misery. To find one's home in space one may travel, but if a man is

looking for his true habitat in time he must have books—and the right ones. What chance is there for him, however, so long as our libraries remain mere disorderly chronological heaps, ancients and moderns promiscuously piled? Things would be simpler for the home-seeker, and he would feel less like an idle vagrant if our shelves were so arranged as to constitute legible maps of time.

I once found a book-shop in which this principle had been followed. The long and narrow room was lighted by a large window in front and by another much smaller one at the far end, in which a potted geranium held up its translucent leaves. Midway between the two windows was a place of deep shadow. The walls were tapestried with books from top to bottom—phlegmatic folios squatting along the floor and nimble twelvemos crouched just below the ceiling. Nearest the front door were the books of recent date, and the age of the volumes increased *pari passu* with the shadows, so that as one went down the room he advanced almost literally into the Dark Ages. Contented inhabitants of the twentieth century needed to take only a step or two from the front-door in order to find all the books they would care for, but others were invited to explore the shadows, which would seem their native ele-

ment. I saw that the true bibliophile would stride swiftly, and perhaps a little scornfully, out of the front-window glare into the twilight of the eighteenth century, and from there I could imagine him sinking down and down through the ages—until he brought up against the geranium. By the assistance of such a chronological Baedeker as this book-shop provided he would be able to proceed at once to his own century, even to his particular decade, without much fumbling or hesitation. He could find his temporal home.

This was a beautifully simple solution of the shelving problem, but it would not suit all readers, for the simple reason that you cannot divide the human race cleanly, that is without leaving awkward remainders, into ancient, mediæval, and modern types. Another of the important lines of variation is what we may call the climatic. By this I mean that readers may be separated, roughly, into three zones: torrid, temperate, and frigid. It is notorious that many of the infelicities of literary intercourse are due merely to mismatings, as of a polar person with an equatorial book, or vice versa. They manage these things better in France, for the French have never shared the naïve assumption of England and America that every book put into print is intended for

everybody. In America, where the child clambers from the cradle to read the books its grandmother will handle only with the fire-tongs, the situation is growing serious. So painful are the sufferings of a few frigid people from these miscegenations that the postal authorities and the police have recently created special departments of literary criticism, apparently with the design of eliminating torrid books altogether. (Strange to say, nothing has yet been done, or even suggested, to alleviate the anguish that torrid people have long endured, for the most part in silence, from frigid books.) Something tells me that these drastic measures will not work; the book-burners of the Middle Ages gave them a fair trial, with results exactly like those we observe to-day. And I have not much hope, either, for the librarian's clever device of keeping the torrid book under lock and key for his own private edification. All such schemes are doomed to failure so long as there remain torrid persons in quest of their literary ilk—and this is likely to be a very long time.

I suggest, then, that our libraries might well be arranged on the plan of a mountain in the Andes or Himalayas, one of those systematic piles of climates upon which one passes swiftly from equatorial to arctic conditions. For such

a vertical arrangement it might be well to house our larger libraries in sky-scrapers, so that one might go up and down in search of the shelf corresponding to his exact temperature. This suggestion may seem to lie open to the fatal impediment that it would throw too many of our official and volunteer censors of the public morals out of a job; but I see no such necessity, for they might then busy themselves in securing legislation which would prohibit, to every man and woman and child in the land, the use of any books outside of his or her precise degree of latitude. My proposal is made in the interests of every literary class, including the police and the public-minded specialists in pornography. It would solve at one stroke the whole problem of book-censorship by mere segregation. And finally, it would group books according to consanguinity. Sappho and Miss Elinor Glyn, for example, would be brought close together, perhaps on the same shelf.

In this last suggestion there is a hint for a totally different method of arrangement. Why should we regard only the convenience of readers and never the welfare, not to say the happiness, of books themselves? We have to

spend only a few minutes, more or less, in finding a given volume, but our books are obliged to live year after year in the company in which we place them. No imaginative person who spends much time among his books can think of them as only so many masses of dead and inert matter. They become for him, as the years pass, faint reincarnations of the men and women who wrote them. That copy of Doctor Johnson in strong, brown calf, which has been dozing on my shelf these two decades, has grown, or so I fancy, more and more ponderous-bellied, more blear-eyed, more dogmatic, and more addicted to intemperance in tea. I treat that book with a certain deference, as though it might resent an indignity with right Johnsonian vigour. I place it between Edmund Burke and Sir Joshua Reynolds, where I hope it will be at ease. Hume and Voltaire and other such-like unbelieving dogs I keep away from him. Well, and what prevents me from showing a similar delicacy of feeling toward this Christina Rossetti in pale-blue cloth? Shall I do justice only to the strong? Is it fair to her, is it even decent, to leave her in a dusty corner with this hulking Rabelais?

I know a man who arranges his books solely according to their height, and this blundering excuse for a method has produced upon his

shelves a heart-breaking state of affairs which could not have been much worse if inspired by active and deliberate malice. His set of Thoreau is lodged beside Lord Chesterfield. His copy of Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* is wedged between two volumes of John Wesley's *Journal*. I shall not harrow the reader's sympathies by further gruesome details. Suffice it that the man who owns this torture-chamber is really a kind man at heart, but a little dull. He has never imagined the talk that would—or would *not*—have gone on between Wesley and Sterne if those two eminent and contemporary gentlemen of the cloth had been seated, for their sins, side by side at some London dinner-table. He has never, in a moment of agonized fancy, seen Lord Chesterfield step into the bare little hut at Walden Pond and suffered for both parties in that colloquy. Most cruelty is due to lack of imagination.

Consider also the heartless tyranny of the alphabet. A library arranged according to the initial letters of its authors' names is, to any right-minded person, a house of horrors. Nothing whatever in the present chaos of bookshelving methods prevents Sappho from standing beside Savonarola, or Elinor Glyn beside William Ewart Gladstone. What can we suppose that Keats will find to say to Immanuel Kant,

or Kant to Keats? Do Jane Austen and St. Augustine represent our notion of a congenial couple? Shakespeare and Shelley, Bacon and Bagehot, are not so bad, but speaking in general the alphabet makes strange shelf-fellows. I fear it is a fact that in hundreds of libraries Felicia Hemans, that precise blue-stocking, is lodged beside Heinrich Heine, the irreverent Jew; and when one thinks of Amy Lowell cheek by jowl with Longfellow he feels like rushing out to found a society for the prevention of cruelty to books.

We should have a system at once convenient and humane if our libraries were arranged according to some principle of consanguinity. It should be possible to place books on the shelf with the same delicate attention to obscure likenesses and hidden antipathies that a skilful hostess shows in seating her guests at table. Gathering one's literary guests from all the dark backward and abysm of time, one has them, to be sure, at his mercy, but there is a certain lack of finesse, not to say of courtesy, in setting down pagans among the Puritans and the humble among the proud.

Many tentative groupings leap to mind as one considers the possibilities of this method. The *Lamentations of Jeremiah* should be separately bound and placed beside the *Spoon River*

Anthology. Mr. Dooley should be given a chance to bring Socrates down to date. There would be solid satisfaction in placing side by side the works of Lucian, Rabelais, Cervantes, and Mark Twain—four kindred souls whom the centuries have unjustly kept apart. The suggestion is so exciting to the fancy that one can almost hear the peals of laughter that would ring from cover to cover of the little group, and see the volumes rock and reel upon the shelf.

Of course, such an arrangement as this would require a great deal of knowledge—observe, if you please, that I did not say "information"—and a great deal more of taste. It is so exacting, indeed, that I should like to propose it to the learned gentlemen who conduct examinations for the doctorate of philosophy as a searching test for their literary candidates. Let them place the candidate alone in a room with one thousand unassorted classics of his chosen period, telling him to arrange these in order of consanguinity. No other test need be required, for although I should like to assure myself, if I were an examiner, that the candidate could render orally a simple passage of prose or verse in a manner at least faintly intelligible and not too painful to an average audience, this would probably be asking too much. I submit that

the man who could bring about some sort of peace and order among a thousand volumes in three hours' time would be better fitted to instruct our youth in its literary heritage than the man who has spent three years in trying to memorize the vowel changes of the Germanic languages.

As I sit planning all this there steals over me a thrilling sense of power; for the congenial spirits of the past have been, I see, too widely sundered from one another. Carlyle would have been a happier man with Dean Swift just round the corner; Petrarch and Rousseau would have found so much in common; thinking of the talk there might have been between Horace and Max Beerbohm, between Montaigne and Charles Lamb, between Dr. Johnson and G. K. Chesterton, I realize for the first time what golden opportunities have been missed. Given such materials—the wise and witty, the pleasant and the profound of all past time—I feel sure that I could arrange them more economically than history has done. Reason, of course, reminds me that there is no real solace now for the lonely souls themselves who are far beyond the reach and need of any social mediation; but reason has had its

turn at shelving systems, and it should have learned humility. There is at least a fanciful pleasure, and a kindness at least to oneself, in such corrections of the more obvious blunders of chronology, in these shadowy introductions of natural friends who had the misfortune to live, it may be, three thousand miles or three thousand years apart.

And so, if I am ever again given free swing in a library, I shall pull literary history to pieces and build it nearer to the heart's desire, striving to raise the shelving of books to the level of a delicate art, as the Japanese have done with the arrangement of flowers. I shall ignore the alphabet, telescope the centuries, and juggle the meridians. The result may look like chaos come again to most observers, but to me it will be beautifully intelligible, a map of my mental travels, my contribution to criticism and learning. I shall try to bring together those who were born to be friends but could never meet. By the arrangement of the books in that library I shall do all I can to atone for the more flagrant injustices of time.

THE books of my friend Barnes have been dipped in the Fountain of Perpetual Youth. No commentative pencil of his ever soils the purity of a margin. To the thousand authors in his library he gives carte blanche, and they may say what they like without fear of objection or rejoinder from him. He would no sooner intrude upon an author's text than he would interrupt the same man's favourite story at his dinner-table. The result is that you may take down a volume which has been on his shelves for thirty years and find it looking like some indecently well-preserved octogenarian who has grown old in vain, upon whose inexperienced face time has written exactly nothing.

I have another friend who regards the margin of a book not as the author's preserve but rather as a public common, convertible at need into a tilting-ground. Admitting that the simple and rather vacuous beauty of youth is well enough in its time and place, Smythe feels that it can never contend with the deeply scriptured beauty of old age. All things that are really young he is able to tolerate because he sees them hastening towards maturity, but

a mummied and stationary youth is to him faintly horrible. Therefore his books age rapidly under an industrious pencil.

You are left in doubt while reading a volume belonging to Barnes whether its owner has ever gone before you, for he flies through a book like a bird. Smythe tramples ruthlessly and heavy-shod up and down the margins, frequently splashing into the text itself, shouting encouragement and praise to his author, and then again, it may be, warnings, complaints, accusations, withering contempt. His jottings often remind me of an eager self-forgetful undergraduate yelling advice to his college boat from the towpath of Isis or Cam or Thames. A stroke well pulled gets instant praise, but any sign of bungling brings forth such a roar of wrath that you almost forget the boat in the stream for the runner along the bank. Or one might say that reading a book of Smythe's is like sitting in a disorderly theatre and hearing, besides what is said on the stage, the bravos and cat-calls of an excited audience. *Lectio sine stilo somnium.* Smythe never sleeps while he is reading, and those who read after him seldom do.

Barnes reads as many words in a year, I suppose, as Smythe, but none of them ever take root and grow, in his barren margins,

into flowers of fancy, thickets of erudition, or bitter weeds, even, of disgust. How is it that the same verbal seeds, blowing over into Smythe's margins, shoot up there into jungles of comment, making two books grow where there was only one before? Although he has never published anything, and has no desire to do so, Smythe is really a voluminous author, for he has composed no small part of what is to be read in the volumes on his shelves. To the books of his own library and to those of his friends he has added reams of generous praise and folios of vituperation. A more altruistic service it would be hard to find in the world of letters. He mixes himself with a book as a silkworm mingles with a mulberry-leaf, producing a compound better than either of the ingredients. He nuzzles and burrows in a book like leviathan in the ocean wave, gulping down great gallons of text and then blowing them aloft in a rainbowed spray of marginal notes.

How shall we explain such a contrast? Well, it has not been sufficiently observed that in the world of letters the sexes are three: mere writers, mere readers, and a *tertium quid* made up of those who can both read and write, whom we may as well call marginalians. The mere writer is active only; the mere reader, like Barnes, is entirely passive—and

these are comparatively poor creatures, partial and incomplete. But the marginalian is both active and passive, both a storer and a producer. He has been unduly neglected.

To be fair to the marginalian we must understand what he is trying to do, we must try to guess what motive has propelled Smythe's pencil over all these miles of self-forgetful commentary. Let it be remembered that a writer usually addresses an audience of some sort, however dimly imagined, however small. He sees shadowy heads and faces bowed above his book or letter or lyric, following his thought, smiling at his whimsies, living along his lines. For writing is, after all, only a soundless kind of talk, and talk presupposes a listener. Yet here is a sort of writing which seems to be addressed to no one—not even to the writer himself. That is the mystery about marginalia, a dark matter which has never yet been explored. To whom are they addressed?

I can suggest only one answer to this question. Many people imagine, while they are reading, a faint sub-audible voice, the author's voice, talking, talking incessantly. (Some authors, of course, are more audible than others. Carlyle is vociferous, stentorian; but Addison I

can scarcely hear.) Now there are persons, mere readers like Barnes, who can endure almost any amount of monologue from others without wishing to interrupt, and again there are persons who cannot endure any of it. These are the people who are for ever cutting into one's best stories with their own ill-timed and irrelevant remarks. Obviously, if they cannot sit out five minutes of brilliant viva voce discourse, they would find a thousand pages of unbroken monologue, from an author to whom they need not pretend politeness, an intolerable torture. And so at every paragraph break and full stop they try to edge in at least a word, strive to convert a lecture into a conversation. And they address these interjections, I believe, not to any future reader of the book, not to themselves, but to the author.

This may seem a fantastic solution, but I have instances to prove it. Consider, first, the example of Coleridge, who was a titan of monologue in the drawing-room and in the study perhaps the most voluminous of all marginalians. Is it not clear that these two traits belong together? In proportion as he loved the sound of his own voice he was impatient of another man's. As a talker he bore down all opposition with the majestic indifference of the forces of nature, and his

treatment of authors dead and gone was very like that which he accorded to living men and women. He strove to out-do his author in volubility, to talk him down, to smother the first book under a second. It is well known that everyone was eager to lend him books because he returned them, if at all, enriched with annotations that tripled their value.

Concerning these unpublished works, De Quincey has a theory which must be dealt with because it sharply contravenes my own. "Coleridge," says he, "never wrote a line for which he did not feel the momentary inspiration of sympathy and applause, under the confidence that all which he had committed to the chance margins of books would converge and assemble into some common reservoir."

The more I consider that remark the more I am astonished that it should have come from a man who knew so much about the philosophy of composition as De Quincey certainly did. Of course I know that a few half-hearted marginalians such as Poe and Montaigne have resurrected and published their own jottings, somewhat as Rossetti exhumed the bundle of sonnets he had buried with the body of his wife; but this need not shake our faith in the purity of their original intentions. De Quincey would have us believe that the book-notes of

Coleridge were poisoned at their very source by thoughts of publication. "Coleridge's knowledge that the Arethusa of truth in these jottings would for a time flow underground," he writes, "did not disturb but rather cheered and elevated the old somnambulist." How is this? While writing his marginalia Coleridge is inspired by anticipated applause which can reach him only after their publication, and yet he is at the same time cheered by the realization that such publication must be long postponed. A somnambulist indeed! Considering that a score of newspapers and magazines were always open to him, not to mention the lecture platform and his numerous unfinished books, one would like to know why he took such a devious way of winning sympathy and applause as this of committing his thoughts to the wormy pages of Saint Chrysostom and Thomas Aquinas.

One disagrees with De Quincey on such a question as this only with great hesitation, and yet I insist that we shall understand the marginalia of Coleridge only when we think of them in connection with that majestic eloquence of his which De Quincey himself has so well described: "Coleridge, like some great river, the Orellana or the St. Lawrence, that, having been checked and fretted by rocks or

thwarting islands, suddenly recovers its volume of waters and its mighty music, swept at once, as if returning to his natural business, into a continuous strain of eloquent dissertation, certainly the most novel, the most finely illustrated, and traversing the most spacious fields of thought by transitions the most just and logical, that it is possible to conceive." No man who can talk like that will be held long silent by the greatest book ever written.

There is a further and a conclusive proof of my theory in the fact that whenever marginalians become denunciatory, they drop the urbane style of general observation and fly directly at the head of the author himself. Almost any copy of *The Domestic Manners of the Americans*, by the mother of Anthony Trollope, will show this. The treatment given to this lady by early American marginalians indicates that American literary manners, at any rate, once left a good deal to be desired. She had crossed the sea entirely at her own expense and, no doubt, with an exalted missionary spirit, hoping to improve American taste by selling articles of *virtu* in wildest Ohio and, incidentally, to keep the future novelist in pocket-money at Winchester College. Finding that she had overestimated the backwoodsman's appetite for bric-à-brac, she discovered that way of

replenishing the purses of British travellers which has since become widely popular and which was strongly urged by the elder Weller upon the impecunious Pickwick: "And then let him come back and write a book about the 'Merrikins as'll pay all his expenses, and more, if he blows 'em up enough."

Everyone read Mrs. Trollope's sprightly book, the English Tories because it told them what they wanted to hear, that the Western experiment in democracy was already a dismal failure, and all good Americans because they considered it an outrageous insult. Almost any copy that has been in the hands of an early American marginalian is therefore a happy hunting-ground for one who enjoys the rhetoric of invective. My own copy of the first American edition, 1832, is equipped with a full apparatus of notes pencilled into it almost a century ago by some anonymous patriot. He treats exhaustively and with perfect confidence all matters having to do with Mrs. Trollope's ancestry, social position, veracity, personal appearance, habits, and probable future. By way of extra-illustration he draws several portraits of the authoress, all of which seem to be lacking in authenticity. These additions render a book which is in itself by no means dull very amusing indeed, converting what

had been intended as a dignified solo into an acrimonious duet. Without granting any quarter on grounds of age or sex, and without any ill-timed courtesy to blunt the edge of his invective, he makes remarks sufficiently personal to convince a dozen De Quinceys that marginalia are addressed not to posterity but to the author. Furthermore, although I cannot present the evidence, I am quite certain that he did not expect or even wish his diatribe to be published. I shall respect his wishes. The etiquette of marginalia seems to have been in much the same rudimentary condition in 1832 as that of the telephone is to-day.

I ask myself why this passionate annotator did not send Mrs. Trollope a vitriolic letter instead of venting his spite upon her book. The answer is, I think, that the book was nearer at hand than its author, a sort of hostage or captive from the enemy's camp which he could torture at will. More than that, his stern and cutting words indicate that he thought of the authoress as somehow present in the volume itself, visibly distressed by his searching sarcasms. In maltreating the book he felt that he was hurting her, much as the mediæval witch felt that she was injuring her enemy when sticking pins into his waxen image, or as a modern mob feels that it is

doing a man serious damage while burning him in effigy. Many marginalians, I believe, are as naïve as that. For a complete explanation of their activities one might have to range far afield into imitative magic.

And yet, however naïve they may be, marginalians are almost always intelligent. Now and then we do find among them a foolish commentator, whose remarks merely show that he cannot comprehend what he is reading, but even such remarks are better than the blank idiocy of the trackless page. Readers energetic and positive, readers with character, whether "good" or "bad," always blaze a trail. They never leave a book, any more than they leave the world, exactly as they found it. These, as Iago would say, are fellows of some soul.

If we cannot say that quite all marginalia are highly intelligent, at least they are always honest, and this is much. A creeping paralysis of urbanity has overtaken critics and reviewers during the last century, leaving too many of them merely polite, Laodicean, anæmic. We are such perfect ladies and gentlemen of letters nowadays, treading so softly in fear of enthusiasm and the libel law, that we can only damn with faint praise and approve with a saving mixture of condemnation. Where is now

that hale and hearty plain-speaking of a century since: "This will never do!" and "Back to the shop, Mr. John Keats"? Where shall we look for such literary raptures as that of Lamb and Leigh Hunt, or for Swinburne's "pure joy of praising"? Such things are no longer seen in the published reviews and critiques, but yet they still exist. You will find them still flowing strongly underground in the margins of books. Erudition, bitterness, and whole-hearted praise, which once made criticism a readable department of literature, are even now discoverable in the writings of the third literary sex, which is composed of those who dare to say what they think of an author to his face.

Among the most interesting of all marginalia are those written by the giants of the Renaissance in the margins of ancient classics, for there never have been more voracious readers than these men were, and they had a whole new world to read their way into and to understand. Such reverence for the past as theirs we shall hardly see again, but their judgment was never completely overwhelmed by their piety. Casaubon made a fully annotated edition—which, to be sure, none but he could read—of every classic text he owned, scribbling his comments on the margins of the volume

itself. Scaliger's beautifully clear annotations were an adornment even to an Elzevir. Going farther back, and indeed to the very beginnings, the marginal comments made by Petrarch in his precious manuscripts of Seneca, Cicero, and the like—comments brought together and minutely studied by Pierre de Nolhac—often startle the reader by their revelation of a supremely interesting mind under the impact of a lost and suddenly rediscovered world. One of the more amusing of Petrarch's marginalia occurs in his copy of Quintilian, against a passage in which the rhetorician speaks slightingly of solitude. This touched the Hermit of Vaucluse upon the raw, and he, finding the margin quite inadequate for the expression of his feelings, wrote down: "Respondebis in tractatu vite solitarie" ("You will reply to this in your treatise on the solitary life"). And somewhat later he wrote below the first sentence "Feci ut potui" ("I have done what I could"). His Treatise on Solitude extends to some forty thousand words, and is probably the amplest marginal note on record.

These were mighty men, but I think that if I were asked to name the monarch and exemplar of all marginalians I should finally fix upon Montaigne. He had, at any rate, the exact temperament of which good margina-

lians are made—he was shy, yet sociably inclined; self-doubting for the most part, and yet often belligerently self-assertive; indefatigably curious and avid of facts, yet quite unable to remember anything for ten minutes because he always had to pierce and, as it were, consume the fact by asking what it might mean. Indeed, his phenomenal forgetfulness is almost enough by itself to explain his supremacy, for whenever you get a very bad memory coupled with a brilliant mind, as it often is, you have already the making of a marginalian. Pacing with his Cicero in hand up and down his little book-room in the tower that looked out over the orchards of Périgueux, the Sieur de Montaigne had a quill and inkhorn always ready for the comments, queries, objections, and additions that his author might suggest. For while he read he was asking himself continually, "Just what does all this mean to *me*?" and if he did not set down the answer at once on the margin of the book itself, it was gone for ever. These incondite jottings grew and grew until one day, when the self-assertive mood was uppermost, the audacious notion occurred to him that they might have some value by themselves as a rough record of one man's encounters with life and literature. He set to work upon the books

of his small library, rifled the contents of their margins, reduced the whole mass of material to a rude order—and thus the modern essay was born.

It is surprising that no one has clearly seen this before, but I think it must now be evident that precisely those qualities which made Montaigne a supreme marginalian fitted him to be also the father of the familiar essay. And all true essayists since his time have been marginalians also, scribbling their comments and queries, their objections and addenda, upon whatever blank spaces they have found. Like their forerunner, they have for the most part enjoyed and profited by very fallible memories. They also have been shy, yet socially inclined; self-doubtful and self-assertive; curious about facts, yet always bent upon finding out what facts signify—even the most trivial. Like Montaigne, they have differed from those whom I venture to call "mere writers" because they have not striven to grow flowers without any roots but have been content to gather what they have found, chiefly in the fertile mulches of the past.

And what, after all, can any of us hope to do much better than to add our marginal comments here and there upon what lies before us in the Book of Life and Letters? This may seem

a humble task, but we shall need all our energy and intelligence to perform it worthily. We cannot hope to add much of value to what the ages have written—but what do we think of it all? What passages can we praise, and what must we disapprove? To answer these questions clearly, even to and for ourselves alone, is no small accomplishment. One may do worse than to live and die a Marginalian. One might have been only a Reader—or even a Mere Writer.

CUI BONO?

In the archives of the Society for the Preservation of Useless Knowledge one may read (Third Series, Volume 743, page 1067) a categorical statement that the hair of Helen of Troy was raven black, and in the Appendix to the same volume this statement is backed by citation from several scores of unimpeachable authorities. So confident an assertion is very comforting to a hurried amateur until he comes across the exactly contrary opinion of Herr Professor Eitel Fleiszumnichts, who says, in the twenty-seventh volume of the elaborate work which he has devoted entirely to this topic, that Helen's hair was of a vivid golden hue—drawing the inference that she must have been, like William Shakespeare and Confucius and Zoroaster, of Teutonic extraction. Seeing that these eminent authorities disagree, it seems best for others to maintain what is called in academic circles a "balanced judgment." So, at any rate, thinks M. Czrdksmptja, who, with his well-known skill in splitting the difference between two errors, hazards the suggestion that Helen's hair may

have been neither black nor golden, but auburn brown.

But just what, you may ask, is a plain man to think under these circumstances?—a man, that is, who can devote only a few years to this absorbing question. Pleasant would it be indeed, if only one could count upon the longevity of Methuselah, to read everything that the aforesaid scholars have read about Helen's hair, to go on from there to ten thousand books and articles they never heard of, to spend a decade or so in arranging one's notes and perhaps a few minutes in thought, and then to come crashing forth with an irrefutable demonstration that the locks in question were green. All this, I say, would be very pleasant, but for my own part I am beginning to realize that I am not Methuselah, and that if I should decide to devote the few remaining years of my paltry threescore and ten to this problem I should be obliged to lay aside my researches in two or three other topics which, though probably less important, interest me rather more.

This is one of the sobering experiences of advancing years. Quite clearly I realize now that I shall never be able to earn an independent opinion as to whether the hair of Helen of Troy was blonde or brunette or some-

thing in between. When young people come to me, with that look of boundless confidence in the wisdom and erudition of old age which is so touching a trait in the youth of our day, asking about the colour of Helen's hair, I shall only be able to say that the S.P.U.K. asserts, on such a page, that it was black, that Herr Fleiszumnichts has concluded, on such another, that it was golden, and that M. Czrdksmptja has apparently confuted them both. Thus will the hungry sheep look up and not be fed.

It must not be thought, however, that I am finding fault with these eminent scholars for not arriving at a unanimous opinion, for that is not their business. Rather, their business is "to follow the truth wherever it may lead them," and this they have all done, with the results just recorded. Once they were agreed, moreover, and had silenced all competitors, their occupation would be gone. Farewell the loaded desk, the portfolios bulging with notes, the letters to the London *Times*, the learned articles, and all the pride, pomp, and circumstance of literary toil. No, I say; let them and those they represent toil on for ever in endless disagreement, so that we may always have the spectacle of their quiet unworldly labours, of their devotion to hopeless tasks, and of their fine disre-

gard for all questions of base utility. I am convinced that it does us all good to think of the patient happy years they spend, walled round by books and all but snowed under by drifting notes, in quest of bits of knowledge too minute for the world to notice even when they are found. If we smile at them, let it be wistfully, never with anything like contempt.

I have heard that there was once a candidate for the doctor's degree in an American university who proposed to write his doctoral thesis upon the political and social conditions in Europe that may lead to another war. In an unguarded moment he allowed himself to say that in his opinion this was an important subject and one which had some bearing upon practical affairs. The two words "practical" and "important" were enough to convince the professors who had him in charge that he should not be allowed to attempt any such study, and they proposed, as an alternative, that he travel through Europe and Asia, at the University's expense, studying the methods used in different countries for indicating the decimal position. This, they said, was a task that needed to be done, and one well within his powers. . . . When last heard from, this budding scholar was serving as a clerk in a haberdasher's shop.

The man who told me this tale regarded it as a severe commentary upon our modern universities and scholarship, but the more I think of it the more I am inclined to the opinion that it is to their credit. Although I certainly should not wish to exaggerate the intelligence of college and university professors, it is pleasant to feel that in this instance they showed real discernment. They may have felt that America has already turned out all the sophomoric advice to Europe that can reasonably be expected from her for some time to come, and that she would do well to confine her attention to questions she is not quite so sure about, such as the matter of the decimal position. They may have reflected, also, that the schools and colleges of America are already oversupplied with a certain kind of young teachers, and that the ranks of haberdashers' clerks must be kept up.

Most of us have acquired very definite notions as to what kinds of activity have social value and what kinds have none. We do not know just where we acquired them; we cannot exactly remember when we thought them out or when we subjected them to an impartial criticism; they seem to be "in the air." Yet we are so confident of these notions that we often pass severe judgments upon the few who

do not quite agree with or wholly live up to them; and very seldom do we reflect that what seems socially important to us once seemed of no value whatever, and may again, in the near future, be held in slight regard. It happens that just at present the strenuous and expansive "social servant" is in style, representing the latest fashion in men—a fashion somewhat more enduring than that which governs our choice of collars or of automobile bodies but just as certainly impermanent. Another war, the crash of a single day in the stock market, one great artist or thinker, may at any time brush this ephemeron aside into the limbo of discarded fads. This whole solid-seeming Western civilization of ours is based upon a few ideas and preconceptions, some of which are certainly false and most of which have never been examined. No thoughtful person can take its estimates of value as axiomatic.

And meanwhile, before this inevitable and perhaps imminent change of fashion in ideas, there are quite enough of us scurrying officiously about on errands that the world calls important. Business men of all varieties have now gone in for "social service," and volunteer "uplifters" are rushing to the standard from all quarters. While the rest of us spend all our days collecting disks of silver and gold and bits of

stamped paper, we may well be patient with the few who spend their lives collecting meaningless facts. They are not all that we could desire in the way of scholars, but they are as good, probably, as we deserve, seeing that the natural complement or correlative of the business man is the pedant, the world-forgetter. There is some satisfaction for us all in feeling that we are rich enough to support these men, and always there is a possibility that their work may not be quite useless after all. There was a time in the world's history when the colour of Helen's hair was a matter of international importance, and conflicting methods of indicating the decimal position may yet embroil the Balkans. Only the ages can decide whether these selfless enthusiasts or we have added most to the world's total treasure, and they differ from some of us in that they do not try to anticipate the verdict of time.

One of the most important persons in my town, many years ago, was a little man who used to set up a four-foot telescope every evening in the central square and invite the public to gaze through it. The fact that the public did not often accept his invitation did not lessen his usefulness. The important thing was that he stood there on every cloudless night of the year with his telescope pointed

upward, piping in a weak treble at twenty-second intervals: "A view of the celestial heavens. Ten cents." Standing between the bank and the City Hall, with crowds streaming past and the rumble of traffic all about him, he had no part or lot in the city's din. It was good for us to be reminded that the celestial heavens were still overhead and that one man among us considered a view of them worth the sum of ten cents. Even in those days there were millionaires in my town, and captains of industry, powerful teachers, at least one writer famous round the world; but it may be that when the last census is taken the most important citizen the town then contained will turn out to be this little old man with the telescope who quavered a thousand times every evening into our inattentive ears: "A view of the celestial heavens. Ten cents."

A BELATED TRIBUTE TO PRINTERS

ABOUT authors we hear more than enough; even editors are sometimes brought to our attention; but of literature's third estate, composed of men who work at the great Book of Letters certainly as hard and often almost as well as any, we seldom even think. The printer, that silent but never sleeping partner in every bookish undertaking, is generally ignored. Take up any book you please from your reading-table and turn to the title page; there you will find the author's name in bold lettering with the name of the publisher beneath it, but you will look in vain from end to end of the volume to find the names of the men who set it in type. If the book you choose has sold a large number of copies the publisher has made money by it and the author has won fame, but the printers have gained no more than they would have from a mere volume of essays.

All this is far from fair. Remembering how often I have tried the patience of printers and how much I have profited early and late by their knowledge and forbearance, I feel impelled, seeing that no better qualified person

is likely to do so, to acknowledge thus tardily the debt we all owe to these silent heroes of the composing-room.

Concerning their silence I admit that there may be doubts in some editorial quarters. At 2 a.m. in the city room of a metropolitan newspaper I have more than once heard a low rumble and roar rising from far below, as though of mutiny in the hold. Frenzied popping of pneumatic tubes and staccato objurgations at the telephone have led me to infer that there are a few indignities which even printers do not feel called upon to endure. But then a reporter is always hearing things not intended for his ears. Those who write books, at any rate, and those who read them, hear as little from these heroes as they hear about them.

The printer's business being to record the thoughts of other people and to erase himself, we can understand the full measure of the heroism he shows in this only when we consider, in the light of some experience, what astonishing things people will think and commit to writing. However crabbed an author's copy may be, however ridiculous his opinions, however lamentable his efforts to be merry, no murmur from the composing-room ever reaches him. Protests which may have been uttered at first in tones of wail and vituperation come to

his desk as polite "queries." The proof-reader merely wants to make sure that his author thinks America was discovered in 1660 and that Shakespeare wrote the *Canterbury Tales*. If he really does hold these novel opinions, that is, of course, his privilege. The printers will print them.

It would seem, in fact, if we are to judge from what we read, or, at any rate, from what we are invited to read, that they will print almost anything. Therein lies the proof of their heroism. I have just received through the mail, as a gift from the author, a very long poem of such egregious, execrable, and hitherto inconceivable badness that it is painful to me even to think of another man's reading it through; yet this poem is in print. My heroes—or shall I say martyrs?—of the composing-room are doing that sort of thing all the time, and never a word is said. Day after day, year in and year out, they give the permanence of print to words less wise and accurate than they themselves might have written. Now and then one of them does weary of this and decide to write his own words, and Benjamin Franklin and William Dean Howells are enough to show what a printer can do with a pen when he lays down the composing-stick; but such examples are rare, probably because the love of the

craft is usually stronger than the lure of fame.

More than once, after reading a worthless book, I have glanced at the last fly-leaves in the vague hope of finding there some such sentence as this: "I, the printer, have set this up because I was paid to do so, but I assure the hesitating purchaser that it is not worth his money as it was not worth my time." The fact that we never find such sentences is another proof of magnificent self-control. Good printers "follow copy" as faithfully as the wake follows a ship. They follow it through wildernesses of footnotes, through bogs of bathos and deserts of ineptitude. Anyone but a printer would have assumed that I meant "bogs of pathos" in that last sentence, but the printer follows copy. If a writer fancies that a succession of dots . . . three in the midst of a sentence and four at the end . . . is a helpful nuance in punctuation, giving a sense different from that of the dash—I recall that I once cherished this fancy myself—some printers will follow copy even in that. If a writer has the courage to firmly and persistently demand it, he can even induce a printer to use that special device of the modern linotype which enables him to reluctantly split the infinitive!

Add to all this the further fact that whereas

you and I, in our capacity as readers, may skip and vault merrily from the first page of a dull book to the last, the printer must read every word and syllable of it from title page to finis. Now at last it is clear what I mean in speaking of his silent heroism. For hath not a printer eyes? Hath not a printer ears, nerves, a sense of the ridiculous and a capacity for boredom, even as you and I? If his author is tedious, will he not yawn? If his author writes sheer nonsense, will he not feel disgust? If duty bids him set up in type such a frightful poem as this that has just come to my desk, will he not be tempted to curse his Maker and to wish that he had never been born? Oh, as someone says in Shakespeare, we have taken too little thought of this! Obvious and elementary as the observation I have just made may seem, it has never, to my knowledge at least, been made before. Printing from movable types has been going on for almost five centuries, not to consider the Chinese, and yet, until this moment, no social reformer has drawn attention to the pathetic fact that printers are obliged to read every word they print. Even of this present book, now rapidly drawing to a close, some man whom I shall never see to thank has had to read every word. Every word!

All things considered, it is clear that every author ought to give a good dinner once a year to the men who print him. I fear that even I, a mere minnow in the sea of letters, have long owed them that much, but if I am indebted even to the extent of a luncheon, why then what banquets and feasts of Lucullus should be forthcoming from the great whales of literature that churn and thrash so cetaceously up and down in our time, blowing aloft interminable streamers of ink! (Quite as well as you or I, the printer is aware that this notion of a minnow and a herd of whales entertaining him at the festive board is too grotesque for Alice in Wonderland, and yet you see what he has done with it.)

Excellent as my proposal is, there are two good reasons why it will never be put into practice. In the first place, an author seldom knows who his printers are. It is a strange thing, and yet perhaps a fortunate one, that these who are so closely related should not recognize each other when they pass in the street. An author may sit cheek by jowl with the man who is preparing his last book for the world and yet not a glance of animosity will pass between the two. I say that this is perhaps a fortunate thing. There runs a grisly tale in my town about a budding author—his

name, though not the man himself, is familiar everywhere—who did discover the identity of his printer and who, upon what imaginary provocation I know not, slew that printer in cold blood, packed the body in a trunk, and set off with it for a South American port. I am glad to say that his vessel was wrecked off the Carolina coast and that the body of the printer was washed ashore, with the gratifying result that the budding author lived the rest of his days under a *nom de plume*. Some may think it strange that the author should have murdered the printer instead of the printer murdering him, which would have caused no surprise whatever, but a little reflection convinces one that the event was perfectly normal. Authors have long been known as the *genus irritabile*, and it is quite in keeping that they should commit a quiet murder or two now and then; but printers never indulge themselves in this form of self-expression, perhaps because it would not be adequate to their feelings. The results of their self-restraint have been far-reaching, although not entirely beneficial, in our literature.

I myself have known only one of the many men who have toiled first and last over copy of mine. He was very nearly the earliest of them all, and if the others have been somewhat

like him in tolerant kindness, then several things are explicable that would otherwise remain mysterious. I shall never forget the fatherly solicitude and patience he showed towards me when, at a very tender age, I was set down in an editorial chair—no less!—to write all the copy for a small weekly newspaper. How gladly he taught me the romantic meanings of "stick," "make-up," "galley," "frame," and "lead"! How graciously he saved me from blunders while leaving me the sense, so precious to a youth, of sole responsibility! Best of all, he gave me the deep respect for his craft, *ars artium omnium conservatrix*, which I have never lost and which I hope is evident in the words I am writing now. He made me feel, for good and all, a sense of partnership in every literary undertaking with the printers whom I never see and so can never adequately thank.

The second reason why the dinners of which I spoke above will never be given is that authors would feel too uncomfortable in attending them. They know that the general public will stand almost anything in print, and that editors also, as we observe every day, will put up with strange literary wares; but printers—they are another thing. Printers are reading all the time, they read all kinds of books, and what is more, they read them through. Not only is

it to be supposed, therefore, that they are better informed than other people, but it is natural to assume that they are more critical. For, look you, when a man sets up in cold type the words that have been written down, so to speak, in hot ink, he gets a different "slant" upon them. The fancies that ripple so fluently from my fingers as I play the keys of my typewriter will have a different sound, I know, when transposed to the more sonorous and stately-stepping linotype. Piano music on a pipe organ—I can vaguely imagine how it will sound, although a century of writing would not teach me to allow for the difference. . . . And so if any other writer will get up this dinner I shall send a generous contribution—and stay away.

Thinking, as I often do, of the many intricate processes necessary for turning copy into print —thinking, that is, of the wood-choppers in distant forests, of the log-jams on the river, of the pulp mills and the paper-makers, of printers and pressmen and proof-readers, and then of the folding and posting machines, all of which, with many others of like sort, stand indispensably between my words and any reader's eye—how often I have paused over a slovenly sentence and said to myself: "You cannot let that pass. Hundreds of men are

doing their work well in order that yours may have its chance. You must be true to them." And more than once I have started awake in the still night with the imagined rumble of the presses, once very familiar to me, in my ears, and, thinking that they might be grinding out some screed of mine, I have felt like rushing to the telegraph with some such futile words as these: "Stop press. Copy not fit to print. Better follows."

But the presses cannot cease from rumbling nor can the printers leave off printing, whether copy be good or bad, for of the making of essays and of books there is no end. And yet unto every individual essay and every single book there is appointed a place where the typewriter ceases from troubling and even the linotype is at rest. Whether we work with pen or composing-stick and whether we find our own words or broadcast the words of other men does not much matter, seeing how surely and how soon we must all of us come to

THE END.

NOTE

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